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ONE FOOT ON SHORE.

A Novel.

BY THE AUTHOR

OF

"FLIRTS AND FLIRTS; OR, A SEASON AT RYDE."

"Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,
Men were deceivers ever;
One foot in sea, and one on shore;
To one thing constant never;
Then sigh not so,
But let them go,
And be you blithe and bonny;
Converting all your sounds of woe
Into, Hey nonny, nonny."

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
1869.

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ONE FOOT ON SHORE.

BOOK III.—*continued.*

CHAPTER IX.

"I WOULD CROWN ME LORD OF ALL PASSIONS, AND THE PASSIONS WERE LORDS OF ME."

BEFORE Florence moved from that wretched room in the East End, she had one more trying interview; which interview seems to require a chapter for itself, seeing it can hardly be told without the relation of a few other little events, which would make it too lengthy a matter to be treated of at the fag end or beginning of any other chapter discussing other lighter subjects as well.

Cyril Thornton had heard of Mrs. Cholmondeley's death. For a time he had, as Lord Bulmer said, shunned civilized society, and especially the society of ladies. The end may sanctify the means, but till the end is attained, it is the means that the worker is most brought into contact with, and they are sometimes very revolting. So for a time the gentleman's nature revolted against the low means to which the priest had been led to have recourse, but only for a time; then the "one true Church" could dispense no longer with such a valuable leader into its broad straight road with the many finger posts and directors, to save the faithful from any unnecessary straying, and now Father Thornton had already begun his wonderful course of sermons, on the different kinds of love, beginning with the love of dress, and terminating with the love of God.

That course of sermons drew all Belgravia, and was like the last expiring flare up of a

candle, before it dies out into utter darkness. Father Thornton was emaciated now by long fast and vigil, he looked like one of the pictures of the early saints, as many of his admirers said. For there are two kinds of Roman Catholic priests, the kind who grow fat, and the kind who grow thin by fasting, and Cyril Thornton belonged to the latter order. His frame was tall and spare, and only one or two scanty locks of hair fell down at either side of the tonsure ; his eyes had a strange far-away look, as if they saw mysteries, and there was an expression upon his face, as of wrestling, and of being hard beset in the conflict. It came home to the heart of those who listened to his sermons, more than if it had been the light of victory, they were accustomed to see on the faces of the beatified saints, as here in England they smile down upon their worshippers in great cathedral churches, or as abroad they point upwards at the corners of the streets, calling on men to have a higher aim in their

daily avocations. Cyril Thornton's expression was far other than theirs, but still his face was in a measure like their faces, very much indeed like what their faces must have been when they walked upon earth in the flesh, before they had been called saints, and set to stand for ever as golden examples for the rest of men to follow. His face was very like what their faces must have been before they gave up supplicating prayer for a never-ending hymn of praise, before they won eternal crowns, and joined the Church triumphant. He was still one of the Church militant, and might perchance never belong to any other, or by God's mercy he might, anyhow whilst on earth he preached to the multitude, and the multitude flocked to listen to him.

People went to hear Father Thornton's sermons, much as they went to see Lucia Lavington act, because it was one of the things of the day, and all their friends were talking of it; but they hardly came away

the same as they went. They came away with doubts, and with cravings for an infallible guide to help them to escape these doubts, and the faith of numbers was shaken. That was Cyril Thornton's office in especial, to pull down, not to build up, to render men dissatisfied with what they had, rather than to give them anything new and sure. No, that was for another man to do, a man more certain to his own convictions. "Holy Church," that is the Roman "Holy Church," knows the nature of her instruments, and portions out their work to them wondrous wisely, not often sending the eloquent preacher to the lonely village, or the hard working but illiterate curate to discourse before a cultivated audience, as is too often the case in our own branch of the great Church Catholic, less wise in the wisdom of this world. But this work of pulling down was terrible work for the man himself, the man who was no longer certain of anything, never yet had been quite certain about any-

thing, had always had his doubts, and was now only bidden to stifle his doubts, to bow humbly before the decrees of Holy Church, and go on to arouse other doubts in the minds of others. No wonder he wore that look of being hard beset.

All Belgravia was flocking to hear him, looking upon him as an oracle, taking as gospel the words that fell from his impassioned lips, and the man himself was but a mouth-piece, and no longer knew what was gospel, nor even what the word meant. No glad tidings could come to him any longer, he could not receive them. If any man ever was an infidel at heart, it was Cyril Thornton, whom the world called a devotee and an enthusiast.

"A pity the man is such a bigot," said Bertram Beresford, who had found himself in the Roman Catholic chapel, which these sermons were fast making a place of common resort for the fashionable world. He had found himself there together with Philip

Beauregard rather to his own disgust, and yet more to his disgust had found his sister Linda there also, accompanied by her French maid, and thus he spoke, as they all walked slowly away together—

"He condemns us heretics very thoroughly. Not even purgatory allowed to wilful heretics, as I suppose we all must consider ourselves, who have heard him, and yet not been converted."

"Yes, I never knew that before," said Linda tearfully. "I thought they always allowed us purgatory, and a chance there."

"So many works of superwewogation as they do, if we may believe this fellow, will perhaps save us all the same, hewetics though we are," said Beauregard, more connectedly than he generally spoke.

"It is wonderful though, how he distorts Scripture," went on Bertram, who had now fairly shaken off the influence that the sermon had exercised even upon him at first. "Being in England, he accommodates him-

self to the customs of the country, and strings texts together as glibly as a Methodist preacher, and twists their meaning to serve his own purposes just as cunningly; but it is wonderful how convinced he seems of the truth of what he says. I never heard a man preach more as if he were inspired; he must do a wonderful lot of harm."

So spoke Bertram Beresford, who yet was clever, and had listened carefully to the sermon, and set himself to study the preacher, but Dr. Grayling knew more about it. Though he was only just come from walking the hospitals, that young man had a better eye for character already than most men ever attain to, and besides, he was not only Mrs. Cholmondeley's doctor, but occasionally felt Father Thornton's pulse. He had gone to hear the sermon that morning as well as other people, and while he listened he had composed his own prescription for the preacher, without a doubt that he would follow it, though at the same time he

was as far himself from intending to follow the preacher's prescription, as though it had never been declared to him, now in a voice soft as that of the ring-dove, and now again with all the thunders of eloquence. Dr. Grayling called himself a free thinker, that is among his most intimate friends; among his patients generally he belonged to the Church of England, and among Roman Catholics he was looked upon as a young man open to conviction, but that was exactly the last thing he was open to. All the same, he went to hear Father Thornton's sermons, and listened to them with a praiseworthy attention, though all the time he was busy composing his own prescription for the preacher. Still he admired the preacher's eloquence; but as to believing that Cyril Thornton was himself convinced of the truth of what he preached, this Dr. Grayling knew better than to believe.

He hung about a few minutes after the sermon was over, and caught Father Thorn-

ton, as he came out by a little side door, and administered his prescription, which he had not a doubt would be followed by the other, for he was quite convinced of its necessity, and was no other man's mouthpiece in delivering it, nor even the mouthpiece of the whole body corporate of physicians. Indeed, they would very likely have disapproved of the prescription, for this young doctor had new fangled notions, and new lights of his own, and in curing bodies always prescribed what he thought best for them himself, without paying any regard to long established notions, or in any way following the manner of the authorised curers of souls.

"How many more sermons are you to preach?" said he as he gave the prescription, "your brain won't hold out much longer, I can tell you that, old fellow." This was how this young doctor fresh from the hospitals addressed the priest on whose lips all Belgravia had but now been

hanging in rapt and awe-struck attention.

"It is not holding out now," replied the priest, "only my memory. I recollect what I did mean to say."

"I wish I had your memory then," said the doctor, "but that is nonsense. You are a sane man yet, though you won't be so much longer, if you don't look out. It is three more sermons, is not it? Well, I don't know. I wonder what you are selling your life for now, for it is selling, nothing else. Is it a cardinal's hat? The day is gone by for caring about that sort of bauble."

"It is to work the work of God, which each man must perform at the cost of life itself—or of things more precious still," added the priest solemnly with that far away look in his eyes.

"Bosh, I say," said the doctor, "keep that for your pulpit. God gave a man his life, if he did give it, to keep it just as long as he can, and as long as his doctor

can for him. That is the theory every sensible man acts upon. I believe you are right, and that you are mad after all. By the way, you will be sorry to hear my patient Mrs. Cholmondeley is dead."

"Dead!" and the priest's lips turned white.

"Yes, and now what is to become of that beautiful girl, whom you say Mrs. Cholmondeley was looking after, though I am more inclined to believe it was yourself, for all your holy books and grand sounding phrases? The devil only knows what will become of her now, no one else I should say in this fine London of ours. There was that precious young lord knocking again at the door, when I came away this morning, and you believe he does not get in, oh, priest! priest! But I have touched you now with a vengeance," cried the doctor stopping short abruptly in his hard derisive laugh, for the priest had cast a glance upon him that was anything but

priestly, and now turned away, springing into a hansom, and giving a hasty direction to the driver—what Dr. Grayling could not catch, but though he did not hear the order, he thought he could guess very certainly where that hansom would go to.

It was not that day though that Father Thornton saw Florence Berkeley, he did not see her till after Mrs. Cholmondeley's funeral, and just before she was leaving the wretched lodging at the east end. He had preached two more sermons first, and one had been on the love of others, that is to say on love in the ordinary use of the word as employed by novelists and poets, and in that sermon Father Thornton had waxed wondrous eloquent, and the young doctor laughed as he heard him.

"By Jove, this priest don't 'compound for sins he is inclined to, By damning those he has no mind to,'" said he to himself, "quite t'other thing with him. I suppose he thinks if he lays on the scourge heavy

enough on other people's shoulders, he may do what he likes himself. Now to think that fellow does not believe a word that he has been saying, and there are all the women in tears! Oh, my poor mother thinks me a young reprobate, and they have said prayers for me at her prayer-meetings, I believe—tea and gossip meetings I call them—but I would not change my faith, such as it is, for that Father Thornton's, and yet people call him too bigoted. Oh, the fools that people are! Could a man ever bring himself to say such awful things if he believed them, and a man with a face trembling all over with nervous susceptibility? Why he is nothing but heart, that fellow, and a child that he loved could lead him. As if he would threaten all created beings save just two or three, who never were created yet to the best of my belief, with hell torments for all eternity, if he believed there were any such things! Bless you, he don't believe a word of it."

This last remark, though still inaudible, was addressed to the congregation generally, which seemed not only to believe that Father Thornton himself believed all he had been saying, but also to be very much inclined to believe it all on its own account.

"I must see Miss Berkeley to-day, I can wait no longer. Take her my card, and tell her I must see her," so spoke Father Thornton at the door of Florence's lodgings, and the widow woman took the card and went upstairs reluctantly, for she was possessed with a horror of papists, and had a most indefinite idea as to what crimes this priest, whom she had actually left standing at her door, might be capable of committing whilst her back was turned; besides, she felt quite sure that her dear young lady would never consent to see him, so it was but lost labour toiling up the stairs to show her his card. But to her consternation Florence at once said she would see him. "If he is so very anxious, I suppose I

must," she said. "I used to know him long ago before he became a Roman Catholic, and he may have something to tell me about old friends," she added, as she saw the widow's look of dismay. "May I see him in your sitting-room?" and though the widow could not imagine how she should ever purify that apartment hitherto kept sacred for the use of "good Christian people," after it had once been polluted by the presence of a Romanist priest, yet neither could she refuse the request of her lodger, who had been as a friend to her in her affliction, and so she showed Father Thornton into her company sitting-room.

Florence hesitated for a few minutes before going down to receive him. She shrank from seeing anyone; but more especially she shrank from seeing Father Thornton, for she had barely spoken to him since that time at Ryde, when she had asked him to respect her religion henceforward, as she would respect his, and she

feared that now, hearing she was lonely and in sorrow, he had come to urge her with fresh arguments, fresh persuasions to join that blessed fold, in which he himself had found such comfort and such safety. But she knew there was no use in hesitation, so after a few minutes she went down to receive him.

When she saw him she was really frightened, for he hardly looked like a man who had come for a religious discussion, and much less like one intending to pay an ordinary friendly visit. His face was colourless utterly, and there was the far away look still in his eyes, but not as if he were seeing mysteries now, unless it were mysteries of horror, of horror too horrible to be spoken of.

"Florence," he said, in a hoarse voice, very different to his usual clear, distinct utterance, and without offering to shake hands with her, though she had held out her hand to him on entering, "do you re-

collect your old home at St. James's Cray, and your old life there ?"

"Yes, Mr. Thornton, I remember it perfectly, but what has happened to you ? Sit down, please, sit down," for it was terrible to her having him standing there with eyes now fixed upon her face, and yet still seeming to see horrors. She wanted to break the spell anyhow.

But Father Thornton would not sit down. "I will kneel to you, if you wish," he said, "or I will stand, but I will not sit in your presence, at least not yet. You recollect those old times, you say ; tell me then, Florence, I have often played with you when you were a child, I helped you with your studies when you were a young girl, and your studies were all-important to you—tell me, did I ever win any regard from you ? Have you ever felt any friendship for me ?"

Florence was terrified ; never since she was quite a child, had he called her by her name in this way, and there was some-

thing desperate and awful about him, but at any cost she would speak the truth, so she said, "Yes, Mr. Thornton, I have always felt the greatest regard for you, and I would readily be your friend now, if you want a friend, and it were possible for me to be such to you—but I much fear it is not."

"It is possible," he said, and he drew nearer to her. "Florence! do not be frightened, child, I would not hurt a hair of your head, no, not for worlds; I have loved you with the maddest of loves, and I love you still as madly as ever. I have tried to make myself believe that it was not you, but the blessed Virgin and the sweet womanly nature that I loved, but it has been all mockery and self-deceit, and I have awoken now. Do not shrink from me, I am no more a Catholic than you are, and how can I then be a priest? I tell you I am not; I am as free to offer you my love as any other man. I do offer it; I love, I adore you. Speak, Florence, speak, be my

good angel, and save a despairing man, who has no hope now, but in you."

He had fallen on his knees before her, and was clinging to her dress now in his abject hopelessness, and yet there was a sort of hope in his eyes, a hope which it was more dreadful to Florence to see there, than even the look of horror before.

"I do not ask your love," he said, "I would not have my angel abase herself so far towards one so unworthy. I only crave your pity—humbly at your knees I implore it. Save me, save me from going mad. I believe in nothing now, but in you."

"Mr. Thornton, you are mad already, or you would not speak thus. Get up, get up, I implore you. You do not know what you are doing, you are over-excited and beside yourself, but, thank God, I do not believe what you have been telling me. You are overwrought—I am overwrought often myself—and I know people are hardly responsible for their actions when they are in that state."

"I am responsible," he cried out. He had risen up now, and was standing again. "There is no one else that is, unless it is the devil, for there must be a devil. Even if there is no God, yet there must be a devil, I know that, and he is all-powerful. It is not myself, but the devil in me that would like to strangle your lordling lover before he ever draws near to you again. Yes, let Lord Mincington beware! Holy Church, even if it is in all else a mockery, has weapons which are no mockery, and I can make use of them. Still enough of me left to do that," and a smile wreathed round his white lips.

Then Florence laid her hand upon his arm. "Mr. Thornton," she said, in the soft clear tones that exercised such a witchery over the audience at the New Theatre, "you are mad, or you would not use such language to me. Language unfit for me to hear, or for any woman. But I am not angry with you, because I see you are not

yourself. Listen, you do *not* love me any longer, though you fancy you do; that is the delusion, not your religion. You know nothing of me now, and I am different from what I used to be, and I never was what you fancied me. So far from being an angel am I, that though I know I ought only to feel pity, I do feel anger as well, not with you, but with all your infallible guides, and confessors, and directors, who have brought you to such a pass. I am your friend, I shall always be your friend, and I ask you now as a friend to go to some good doctor, and when he has cured your body, then I should urge you to go to some good clergyman, who may show you where you have erred, and give you the comfort you so much need, for, as it is, you are incapable of being comforted. Go to a doctor first; and now shake hands with me, and never fancy again that you love me, for I tell you to your face you do not, any more than does Lord Mincington, whom at

the same time I tell you I shall never like as well as I like you, for I shall always be your friend."

She had said all she could think of to say to him, with his wild eyes staring despair at her all the while, but she was trusting more to her voice than to her words to soothe him, and her voice seemed to have its accustomed effect, for he shook hands with her, and seemed about to go away.

But before he went, he drew from the pocket of his coat a parcel, and gave it to her.

"I meant to break it in your sight," he said, "now I only ask you to keep it for my sake. For me, I never wish to look upon it again. Think of me, if you ever think of me at all, Miss Berkeley, as a man, who, whether he loves you or not—you say I do not, well, I know nothing—but think of me at all events as a man, who has no hope left, none, none, since you abandon me, and will still be nothing but my friend.

It is not a friend, I want, it is a guide, and I have no guide, and no hope," and so he went away with the old look of horror in his eyes.

Florence undid the parcel after he had left her. It contained a little copy of one of Murillo's Virgins, a pretty picture enough —and, given to her in this way, she always treasured it, but she never at all understood why it was given to her thus, nor why Cyril Thornton wished never to see it again. She did not discover any likeness in it to herself, indeed there was little enough now; it had been like to her when she was a young, happy child, at St. James's Cray, looking out on the world with brave blue eyes, blithely unconscious of the evil in it, and the sorrows that were to come; but there was very little likeness left in her now to this picture of the holiest among women.

The day of Mr. Thornton's last sermon Florence left her old lodgings, and went into the little house in the quiet Square,

and, as she did so, she thought of Cyril Thornton a good deal, and of her last interview with him, but she was over-wrought herself in those days, and for long after, and so, as she could do nothing for him, she tried to persuade herself that he would have followed her advice, and might one day be a sane man among men again.

But Cyril Thornton went to no doctor, he asked no human being for guidance any more. He preached the last sermon of his course next morning on the love of God, and it was a very beautiful sermon, and many conversions dated from that day, and even of those who were not converted, the hearts of many waxed warm, but the preacher's heart waxed not warm, and the preacher was not converted. There was nothing to convert him from, so how could he be? After that his old haunts knew him no more, the fountain of his eloquence was dried up, and as he could no longer be useful in the old fashion, now at last his

prayer of long ago was granted, and he was permitted to efface himself, and enter into the monastery of La Trappe. There, among the brotherhood, he was known as Brother Thomas, but the world knew him no more.

He had preached his last sermon, and after that he might go into a monastery. It was as good as dying that, almost at least. He could not have killed himself, for to his mind that would hardly have been the act of a gentleman ; but he was a man, as well as a gentleman, and he could not bear his life, so he made away with it after what he then thought the best fashion, and became one of the silent brotherhood.

CHAPTER X.

"STRONG COMPUNCTION IN ME WROUGHT."

"WELL, Fan, what are you after now? I wonder how many times that dress has been turned before!"

"More times than Tottles can count, has not it, Tottles?" said Mrs. Bolton, stopping from her work for a moment, to take a toy apparently near its destruction out of the hand of Tottles, a beautiful fair boy sitting on a cushion beside her on the floor. "But never mind, it shall be turned till seventy times seven, if I think it will improve it. I can't bear to look a fright."

"Not easy for you either, eh, Fan! Though God knows you have little enough

of finery," and Major Bolton threw himself upon the sofa, and contemplated his wife.

"What is up now, Harry? The Colonel out of sorts this morning?" and Fanny paused again from her work, and glanced at her husband with an expression of fond, wifely anxiety, more than her words would have implied. And indeed there was plenty in his face to justify a wife in being anxious. Major Bolton was greatly altered from the Major Bolton we recollect at Ryde, thinner and paler, and more than ever all black moustache and gleaming eyes. He lay on the sofa too now with the languid air of an invalid, more than with that of a strong man tired out; and that he had been a strong man his width of chest and broad shoulders showed sufficiently, even if we did not recollect him a strong man at Ryde.

"No, the Colonel is not out of sorts," said he languidly. "How close it is, there does not seem to be a breath of air, and yet it is cold too."

"Tottles, run and bathe papa's forehead with eau-de-cologne."

The little fellow got up, grave as a judge, at once, and hastened to set about what he evidently considered a very important business, but his father caught him up in his arms as he passed, and, kissing him, said—

"No, run away, Tottles, and amuse baby. I don't want my forehead bathed, Fanny, I want to talk to you."

"Go on then, don't you see me standing at 'tention, for all that I am going on with my work?" said Fanny gaily. In all the time she had been at Mauritius, no one had ever heard her speak otherwise, though she had had enough to try her, as they all knew.

"Well, don't make bad jokes then. I can't stand puns, and the fact is—I am invalided home."

"Oh, how glad I am! I am longing to be at home again, and it will be so good for the children." Fanny spoke lightly again, but she laid down her work altogether for a

moment, and got up and kissed her husband.

"God bless you, Fanny; you have been a good wife to me," said Major Bolton, looking fondly into the fair handsome face, which seemed almost improved by the matronly air it had now gained.

"And mean to be, Harry," said she, laughing, as Fanny always had laughed all her life at any display of feeling in any one else. Then she stroked the hair off his forehead with her soft white hand. "Does your head ache, darling?"

"Oh yes, it aches like splitting, but I am accustomed to that now," said Major Bolton with a forced smile. "Jones says I shall be all right in England, if I take things easy, and don't worry myself, but how not to worry myself with these confounded debts of mine hanging like a dead weight round my neck, and dragging me down whenever I attempt to rise, Heaven only knows! I am sure I don't."

Fanny's face had brightened as she heard the doctor's opinion; evidently she had been more anxious than she had cared to show, but now a slight cloud passed over her smooth fair brow, still she spoke cheerfully.

"Florence says you are not to trouble yourself about your debts, and you know, Harry, you have great faith in Florence. Poor dear little Flo!"

"Yes, poor dear little Flo, as you say. She is as good as gold any day, I dare say, but unfortunately she cannot be coined for all that, and I don't know how she is to help us. This grand marriage you talked of does not seem to be coming off; and even if it did, is it likely her husband would give us any help?"

"I don't know about her husband, but I am sure Florrie would; and whilst you were out, I have just got another letter from her, more confident than ever this time, as it would seem, really hoping we are coming home soon, and begging me not to let you

worry yourself about money matters, as if you ever would do so for a moment, if my begging you not to would prevent you."

"Dear Fanny!" Then, after a pause, "And how is Florence herself? Does she say anything about this swell she is to marry?"

"No, that is the odd part of it. I can't quite make it out, but her letter is up stairs, I will go and fetch it for you to read."

"No, don't; I would rather hear her news from you. Tell it me, Fan," and he closed his eyes, and seemed to prepare himself to listen, and Fanny took up her work again, and tried to make a long story of it, for she feared Harry was about to sink into one of those fits of depression now frequent with him, and she knew nothing cheered him so much as the sound of her voice."

"Well, she does not tell much news, poor Florrie, she has written very stupid letters lately, but she says she has left Magdalene Cholmondeley's pretty little cottage, and

gone back to town again—why, I can't think. I suppose though, it is because of those horrid poor people of hers, whom she never can keep away from for long, and she says she has seen Mr. Thornton again, and that he has aged so much, she would hardly have known him, but she really does not tell much more, except that she is well again, and from what she says now I am afraid she must have been very ill."

"She would be sure to say nothing about it till it was over. I see that is always her way," said Major Bolton without opening his eyes.

"I suppose it is," said Fanny hesitatingly. "The rest of her letter is all filled up with questions about Tottles and baby, and how we are all getting on, and are we likely to be coming home."

"Is she living all alone in London now?"

"Yes, so it seems. I am very glad to be going home for her sake, for then she can come and live with us, can't she, Harry!"

"If she cares to taste a little beggary."

"For shame, Harry, how can you! We are not beggars, nor anything like it. I am sure this room is as pretty as any out here, I am almost tired of compliments upon it."

"It is very pretty certainly. Fan, you are a wonderful woman," and Major Bolton opened his eyes now, and fixed them on his wife's face. "You ought to regret a hundred times a day having married me, for you might have married anybody."

"Yes, I might have married anybody, but I preferred somebody," said Fanny lightly, "and I have never repented it once, and why you should think I ought to, I can't imagine. I am sure I have never said a word since our wedding day to justify you in thinking so—now have I? And you know I am not much given to repentance."

"I am," said Major Bolton, gravely, "if I am not much given to good works, I repent my bad works more and more every day I live."

Fanny threw down her work, and flung her arms round her husband, covering him with kisses in her quick impulsive way.

"Dear Harry, why will you talk so? You must not get so low spirited, or you will frighten me really. Don't talk of repenting, when I think you just the noblest, dearest man that ever lived. You will soon get to England now, and be the same man you used to be."

"No, not the same man ever again, any more than you will be the same woman. We were both wild once, but please God we shall never be the same again; though your faults were not like mine, and you said good-bye to them for ever from the day you married me. Mine have clung about me longer, but I mean to throw them off too now, and be a better man from this day forward, so help me God," and Major Bolton pressed Fanny's hand to his lips, and then turned over and went quietly to sleep, and the tears brimmed over in Fanny's

eyes and rolled down her cheeks, till she could not see to do her work, so she just knelt down by Harry's side, and thanked God for the words He had put into her husband's heart to say. Then she brushed the tears away, and went on with her work again.

Fanny had changed wonderfully since her marriage. If she had married the man she loved, and he had been a rich man, she would still have given up flirting at her marriage, for she was honest at bottom, but having married the man she loved, and having had to give up all for him had brought out all the gold there was in her character, ay, and put some gold into it, which never had been there before. In her gratitude for having at last gained the husband, whom she had all along desired, and in her grief over the troubles she could not save him from, though they would have weighed but little on her indomitable spirit had he not minded them, Fanny had, as

Florence said, grown religious. She did not talk much about her religion, nor would anyone have seen it shining forth very evidently in her life, which was perhaps a pity, for religion is not a thing to be ashamed of, or hidden away. But neither is it a thing to be paraded before the world, and the latter fault Fanny certainly succeeded in steering clear of. But that she was religious, no one who knew her really intimately could doubt now. She went to see after the soldiers' wives, and bestirred herself to get them treated as Christians and women, rather than as pigs, as alas! in some parts of the world is still the case, even nearer home than Mauritius, and she was the most good-natured woman in the whole regiment, and always to be counted upon, if anyone wanted a service done them, with a certainty, with which simple good-nature not founded on religion, never can be counted upon. Besides, she was the confidante of

all the love affairs on the station, and always gave everyone the wisest possible advice, and sometimes got it followed too ; never flirting with anyone, indeed, far from flirting with them, she was the most careful of mothers to the young ensigns. They knew, if no one else did, that Mrs. Bolton was religious, these boys fresh from Sandhurst, and all in a hurry to sow their wild oats, if only some wise and lenient hand were not held out to restrain them, warning them that this sowing was quite unnecessary, and that the good seed would answer all its purposes much better without any need for such wretched intermixture.

Major Bolton watched Fanny guiding and restraining these empty-headed, yet not evil-intentioned youths, and was not a little amazed. Much as he respected her, and he did respect his wife from the bottom of his heart, he did at first think there was something of the old flirting nature

re-asserting itself, but he soon saw it was nothing of the kind, and, respecting his wife all the more, let her go on in her own course. Yet, without intending it, he put many obstacles in her way, for Major Bolton had not altered much at his marriage, he had become a happier, but hardly a better man, he still had a bad word for everyone but his wife, and his wife's sister, and he still played and swore not a little, and though Fanny would not have owned it to anyone else, would rather have been torn asunder with red-hot pinchers, she did own to Florence, who, now that seas rolled between them, had become her confidante, that it pained her much that Harry went on with these evil practices. Not only because of the foolish ensigns, who could not understand why the wife should object to the incipient faults in themselves, which she did not seem to observe rooted in her husband, but far more than this because she loved Harry, and cared for his soul's

health even ten times more than she cared for her own, and she knew that rooted though they were, and consequently requiring the whole energy of the man himself to tear up, these were faults, and such faults as he must lay aside if he ever meant hereafter to enter into that kingdom, which we all tell ourselves, God alone knows how truly, that we long to enter into. Fanny had also the additional grief, a grief that must surely wring many a mother's aching heart, of hearing Tottles pick up his father's expressions, and repeat them in his own innocent child voice. It must surely wring the mother's heart to hear this, but how the father must feel is past imagining, seeing that not a few go on the same after as before, amending nothing. In this instance Major Bolton did not hear Tottles repeat his own expressions, for he did not care for his children, which was another grief to Fanny, who was only less devoted to her children than to her husband, though

she certainly was less devoted to them; but Major Bolton did not care for the children, so in his presence Tottles was generally as silent as the still speechless baby, and thus he never heard the childish imitations of himself, which gave Fanny so much pain, but something or another had moved him now, perhaps it had been moving him for a long time, and only found strength for words, when his bodily strength was sinking exhausted. Anyhow he was quite in earnest when he said he meant to be a better man from that day forward, so help him God, and Fanny knew he was in earnest, and those were tears of joy she wept, as she knelt by her husband's side and gave God thanks.

Not many days after that, the Boltons left Mauritius and sailed for England, universally regretted, as they say in the papers, laden too with gifts not a few, for all knew the Boltons were poor, and whether they liked Major Bolton or not,

and a good many did, all the regiment liked Mrs. Bolton, and a good many people of other regiments also, whose misfortune, not fault, it was not to be of "Ours," for Fanny had grown into a regular regimental lady by this time, and talked "shop" as well as anyone, and believed the men of "ours" to be vastly superior to the men of any other regiment under the sun, and their wives in like manner to be superior to the wives of any other regiment.

Major Bolton had to be almost carried on board the day that they left Mauritius, but when they reached the Cape he already walked on shore like quite another man, for the sea air had worked wonders in him, and the lazy sea life with its quiet sleepy sounds soothed the fever in him. Besides, he had determined to be a different man, and he no longer harassed himself about the future, leaving it in the hands of One Who could, he knew, work all things for good, however men entangle them with their

proposings, which after all they have in the end to leave to Him to dispose according to His will. Perhaps it was all the gnawing remorse that had eaten the heart out of him in Mauritius, and with the earnest resolutions for a better life, he now rested somewhat from his repentance, and thus resting took out a new lease of life. The children played round him fearlessly now, as he lay idly upon the deck, his brave cheery wife reading or talking to him as she worked, for Fanny could never be idle now, very different from the 'fascinating Fan' of old ball-going days, who had hardly known the feeling of a needle in her hand. And Major Bolton gained strength and a new character, or rather an amended edition of the old, for no man ever gets a really new character, though he may become a new man, and so it was with Harry Bolton, who was a new man in more senses than one, when he and his wife and children landed in old England again, nearly four

years since the father and mother had quitted it, a newly married couple, who had yet to learn how life would look viewed, as they were now to view it, through double glasses. But there are some doings in old England itself, of which mention must now be made, before we go on to speak of what followed on this landing.

CHAPTER XI.

"IT IS NOT FOR YOUR SILLER BRIGHT."

It was wonderful how many times Percy Gordon considered the subject before deciding when it would be proper for him to pay his first call upon Miss Lavington, and in the end he did not decide about it at all; but, being particularly well satisfied with his get-up one afternoon, and seeing the day unusually fine, he jumped into his Tea-cart, and drove away to the quiet respectable square, which he had not a little difficulty in finding. Very dingy in its respectability did it look to Percy, and most unfit to be the shrine of his goddess, but a golden brilliance came over even the quiet square when the

magical words were spoken, that told Miss Lavington was at home, and would be happy to receive him. He had sent up his card in the first instance, so as to make sure, and now there could be no doubt about it; she knew it was he, and she would be happy to receive him. Somehow almost up to the last moment he had expected that it would turn out all to be a mistake, and that she would send him away. He went up stairs, and found her in a room, about which there was an unstudied grace, such as one would hardly have looked for in such a very quiet square, though almost its only ornaments were lovely hot house flowers, and of course it was easy to know how Miss Lavington came by these. She herself was dressed with almost severe simplicity; she was writing when he entered, and she carelessly pushed her writing away, and, coming forward, shook hands with him cordially.

"I began to think you were not coming to see me after all," she said.

Percy was fairly taken aback by such a friendly greeting, and could only falter out, as he pressed her hand—

"Nothing prevented me from coming before, but my fear of intruding upon your time, of necessity so much occupied."

"Oh of course it is occupied, or there would not be much use in it, but I could always spare time to see you," said Miss Lavington. "Shall I ring the bell for tea now, or do you despise such a feminine luxury?"

"Not at all," replied Percy, more and more overcome by her condescension, "but allow me," and he advanced to ring the bell for her. For almost the first time in his life he really did not know what to say; this actress was so different from what he had expected.

Seeing he said nothing, she now attempted to re-open the conversation.

"I was just writing to my sister, when you came in," she said.

"Indeed, I am afraid I have interrupted you. Pray do not consider me, if you are anxious to finish your letter."

"Oh no, it will do just as well by and bye," said Florence, who was piqued that he did not enquire after Fanny. She had noticed the other night that he had made no allusion to the past life of either of them, and she determined, as he asked no questions, neither would she volunteer any information, for it vexed her that he should make no allusion to the past, nor to any of the old links between them. Perhaps after all he was ashamed of being related to an actress. She knew Percy had always been thin skinned, and very likely it had been a trial to him to come and see her at all; he had taken some time about it, she thought. She herself would have liked to ask him many questions, but she shrank from doing so, for the first question she would have liked to put to him would have been about Evelyn, and Evelyn's death, and though she

had long ago put away the love she had once felt for him, she could not even now bring herself to talk to Percy about his dead wife, unless he first began the subject. Besides, if he shrank from claiming the relationship, she would not force it upon him by asserting her right to question him about his past life. Only, when he said anything that revealed what he had been about since she had last known him, did Florence venture to show her interest in him, appearing much more interested than a Miss Lavington could quite naturally have been; but Percy was infatuated. He was head over ears in love with her himself, and in this interest he only saw a sign, which he hailed joyfully, that she was beginning to be in love with him also.

So they talked on and on always upon indifferent subjects, and yet upon subjects that were not quite indifferent to either of these two, because the other spoke of them, till at last Florence warned Percy that it

was time for her to dress for the theatre, and then he drove away again more in love with her than ever. They had been *tête-à-tête* all the time, and Florence had never had occasion to call Percy by his name, and though it struck her as odd that he should not call her by hers when they were thus alone together, she supposed it was his fancy, and that he was afraid of getting out of the way of addressing her as Miss Lavington, unless he always did so. Besides, as it happened, both times he had called her Miss Lavington he had smiled, and so she supposed he did so partly in joke. Anyhow she had not much time to think of this now, for she had to snatch a morsel of dinner whilst dressing, and then all in a hurry to work herself up into working upon the feelings of her audience as Blanche Beaumarchais.

Percy Gordon became a frequent visitor in the quiet Square after this, and Florence lost the idea that he wished to renew the

old relation between them, for he said nothing of it, nor in any way referred to the Past between them, and as he did not, she was too proud to do so. But he talked to her of his own Past sometimes, of that part of his past life that had had no connection with his Australian Past, nor any connection with herself, and briefly he would refer to his married life, and then they would talk interminable talks about the Future, much as they had done when they had been boy and girl together, and Florence would give him much such good advice as she had given him then, only she was older now, and so of course the advice was more practical; and sometimes she would urge him to have higher motives for his actions, much as she had been used to urge him at St. James's Cray, and one day Percy said—

"How you do remind me of some one!"

"Do I?" said Florence. "Who is it?"

"Oh, some one I knew long, long ago. She was nothing like so beautiful or so

clever as you are, but I cared for her very much then," and Percy sighed and fell into a reverie.

And Florence fell into a reverie too. Could there possibly have been some one Percy had known and cared for before he had known her at St. James's Cray ? He said long, long ago—that surely must mean before he came home from Australia, and he had told her that he had known no women in Australia, except the girl he married, and her mother. It must be some one he had known before he went to Australia, before he came to St. James's Cray too then, and though Florence had long ago ceased to love Percy in the way she had once loved him, she felt a little jealous of the girl he had known before he came to St. James's Cray, and of whom she now reminded him. She never thought it was herself, for it had never occurred to her that he could possibly not know who she was, and then she recollected what Fanny had said about Mrs. Brown, and that Percy

had been flirting with her at Ryde, at the same time that he had been making love to her, Florence, at St. James's Cray; and then, as she did not think it could be Mrs. Brown of whom she now reminded him, she thought there must have been another girl too, either then or before, and from that day Florence called Percy light of love in her thoughts, and his character sank lower in her estimation, and indeed it was not very high before. She had loved him so very much, that she could not help loving him still, only quite in a different way, and she saw he was still beautiful and fascinating, and that beyond that he was clever also, but she saw at the same time that there was nothing in him really, that he was incapable of moulding himself aright, and that even if some one most suited to the task got power over him and did the moulding for him, yet Percy would still be as ready as before to receive a fresh impression from the next person that came across his path, so very plastic was he.

She enjoyed Percy's visits very much notwithstanding; it was very pleasant to her to see an old friend, and, independent of this, it was a great relief to her to talk quite at her ease to an educated man, for she received no other man in the quiet square, and for a long time now she had had no educated man to talk to, and no one who has not tried it can tell what a great deprivation that of their society is.

Women may be very clever and very charming as friends, but their minds are essentially different, and they cannot supply the want of that intercourse with men; besides, as Florence received absolutely no men except Percy, so she had very few women visitors either, only Mrs. Garrick and her daughters, and though they were rather amusing and had taken to her, and professed themselves devoted to her, she did not care much about them, nor could anyone have called them very cultivated, so Percy's visits were a most pleasant variety

to her. Percy, with his early years spent first in the navy and then in Australia, would not by all people have been pronounced cultivated himself, but he was naturally very clever, and his was also one of those natures particularly susceptible of cultivation, so that he seemed now far more educated than half the men who had passed through the orthodox Eton and Oxford curriculum.

To Percy those visits to the quiet Square were tastes of perfect happiness; each time he went he came away more madly in love than the time before, but in the visits themselves there was no madness to ruffle the perfect happiness. Somehow in Miss Lavington's presence he could never make any of the passionate speeches he concocted while away from her, or indulge in any of those pretty tricks of love-making, at which Percy was such an adept; his manner towards her was almost deferential, and he sat at her feet, as it were, more as a disciple

than as a lover. In those days he wished very much to be a better and a nobler man for her sake. What man has ever loved at all without sometimes feeling this wish? But still he did not separate himself from any of his old deteriorating companions; circumstances indeed did separate him somewhat, the circumstances that took him so often to the quiet square and to the New Theatre, but this was the doing of circumstances, not his own doing; and in the same way still not by his own doing, he was separated from Bertram Beresford, than whom he could not have found a better friend, if he had hunted through all the length and breadth of London.

London was beginning to empty now, but none of the people in whom we are particularly interested, were thinking of going out of town. Florence because of her engagement at the New Theatre, Percy because of his mad love for Miss Lavington, the Beresfords partly because Mrs. Beres-

ford, whose health was always very precarious, was now under very special treatment by one of the great London physicians, and partly because as she did not feel equal to all the festivities attendant upon a wedding in their own county, it had been decided that Linda should be married in town, and so they were stopping on now seeing about the trousseau, till it should be time for the wedding. Beauregard remained in town because the Beresfords did; Captain Curzon because he was on leave, and as partridge shooting had not begun yet, London was still the most amusing place to him; Lord Mincington for the same reason as Percy.

The villa at Twickenham was very popular in these hot summer days, and many were the little dinners there, and many the invitations to Miss Lavington to go there to croquet-parties, and dances, and dinners and déjeuners, but she did not go often; indeed, it was as the manager had said, harder to persuade her to go to a party than to do any-

thing else. It was not that she disliked the parties, but she disliked mixing with people as an actress, even though it were as the first actress of the day. She often thought now she would have liked the parties well enough, if she could have gone to them as Florence Berkeley, for she had rubbed off her old shyness, and dislike to strangers; but, going under her assumed name, she felt herself in a false position, and shrank from society.

Then too Lord Mincington added to her distaste for it. He would force his attentions upon her, as if he still believed it was only coquetry that made her repel them, and they had been hateful to her ever since the first day she ever knew him, when he said, "What would I not have given to be in Richter's place just now! Every man in the theatre has been envying him." It was before Florence had made her great success, and when she was taking an inferior part in a small piece, and, of course, she ought to

have felt very much flattered by such a compliment from so grand a man as Lord Mincington, but she knew he was referring to a garden scene, in which, in a game of blind-man's buff, Mr. Richter embraced her, and held her for a few minutes, by mistake for some one else, the heroine of the piece. She knew it was to this scene Lord Mincington referred, and she disliked him from that day forward, as having taken an unfair advantage of her necessities, for though she had reserved to herself the right of choosing in what characters she would act, still, let anyone only look over any twenty of the plays most in vogue now, and they will soon see what hopeless work this choosing is. Indeed, what but the difficulty of this choice would induce amateurs, who are under no necessity to act, to make such extraordinary selections as they do, for private theatricals? So that it not seldom ended in Florence having to act in parts, that were very little indeed, after her own heart. That was, of

course, before she had made herself a name. Now the Miss Lavington, that everyone was talking about, could have pieces written expressly for herself, and had no longer any difficulties of this kind. But she never forgot Lord Mincington's first speech to her, nor was there anything in his after behaviour to lead her to forget it.

Percy Gordon was somewhat of a shield to her against Lord Mincington's advances, whenever she met him at Twickenham, the only place where she now encountered the young lord, since she had won a private dressing-room for herself, and no longer inhabited the green-room, and, when he was not there, she made use of Bertram Beresford, much in the same manner, for Captain Beresford was the sort of man, on whom everyone, who was brought in contact with him, felt inclined to rely, in spite of his being so clever. I say, in spite of his being so clever, not out of any dislike or contempt for clever people, but because it is more

often a good-natured stupid young giant, to whom young ladies are prone to confide their little difficulties, rather than to a clever young guardsman, who means to make his way in the world for all his having been born an eldest son, and heir to a large property, and who is by way also of thinking the Guards too small a field for his vaulting ambition ; yet everyone who knew Bertram Beresford relied upon him, perhaps because he relied on himself so firmly, and yet never forced his own personality upon anyone. He was not at all a forward young man, nor in any way partook of the nature of the young man of the period, and therefore it the more astonished Florence, when, one evening, after he had been serving as buffer for a long time, he seized the opportunity of having taken her in to supper, and thus, for the moment, got rid of any troublesome admirers, to proffer his opinion entirely unasked. "If I were you, Miss Lavington, I would refuse Mincington."

"But he has never offered to me," exclaimed Florence amazed.

"You have never given him a chance, but you would find refusing the quickest way of getting rid of him, I think, and he has bothered you so much, it really is not fair. If I were your brother, I would tell him so, but as I am not, it would not be much use, so though he might require one or two refusals, I think you would find that the quickest and easiest way of getting rid of him. Now shall I leave you alone together after supper, or would you rather I stood on guard a little longer? Don't fancy I should ever tire of doing so, but I think *you* are tired of it all already."

"Yes, I can't bear him!" and a perplexed look passed over the beautiful actress's pale face; she had not quite realised before, that she had only been making a tool of Captain Beresford, who, she was obliged to acknowledge to herself, deserved to be put to a better use, and she now wondered if he had

disliked being used as a tool, and whether it was this dislike that in any way prompted his present advice, but she put away what she felt at once were unworthy thoughts of him, and said: "You are right, I believe, so leave me alone with Lord Mincington after supper. I hope though you are not really very tired of standing on guard, as you call it," she added with a little smile, which vanished almost before it came, as Florence's smiles had a sad trick of vanishing.

"You know I am not," said Bertram, almost as if he were offended. Though he had never shown his love by word or look, indeed he had carefully avoided doing so, yet he thought she must know how wholly and entirely he loved her, and he had an intolerance for meaningless speeches whether civil or the reverse.

So Miss Lavington was left alone with Lord Mincington, and of course he offered to her, and you might have knocked him

down with a feather, when she refused him. Indeed he could hardly believe his ears. That he a young earl, his own master, one of the richest noblemen of the day, six feet three in his stockings, and decidedly handsome, should be refused by an actress, who, as everyone knew, had not got a Marquis or a Duke dangling after her, or even another Earl, it was simply incredible to him at first! And yet Miss Lavington had never given him one single word or look of encouragement since the day she first knew him, but then such are men, after being finished off by a few London seasons under the teaching of "the Belgravian mother." Lord Mincington did not require a second refusal, when he had once understood the first; that took him a little time, but when he had once comprehended it, he took himself off at once, not so much crest fallen, as thoroughly astounded. "There's not another girl in London would have done it," he muttered to himself, as he gathered up the reins of

the two spanking chestnuts with which it had been his pleasure to drive down to Twickenham, and "There's not another girl in London would have done it," he was still muttering to himself, when he drew up sharply at his own door in Jermyn Street, nearly bringing the chestnuts on their haunches, as he did so, for the way had seemed surprisingly short to him, he had had so much to think about, yet he had got no further than that, when he let himself down at his own door, "There's not another girl in London would have done it."

More than you would quite care to reckon up, Lord Mincington, unless your arithmetic is readier than I expect, only you have not been thrown much with them yet. You have drifted hitherto, as we all drift more or less, and not caring much whom you associated with, you have mixed mostly with those, who have sought most after a young earl, his own master; now you have made your first choice of a companion, whom

you wished to make a companion for life, and you have been rebuffed. Choose again, Lord Mincington, and perhaps you will be rebuffed again, for after all, when one is no longer dazzled by the gilding, it is easy enough to see there is not much in you. But if you next offer to the girl, whom you have not chosen so much as she has chosen you, why then we shall soon read of a marriage in high life in the pages of the Court Journal, and those among us, who are fashionable enough, may ere long have the pleasure of wishing joy to a new Lady Mincington.

CHAPTER XII.

"PLEASURE WITH PAIN FOR LEAVEN."

When the Boltons arrived in England, their first idea was to see Florence, and as Major Bolton was to have some more leave before joining the depôt, though it seemed almost an absurdity to call it sick leave any longer, they thought they might as well spend the short remaining time in London as anywhere else; so the whole party came up to town, and having deposited the babies and the luggage in what promised to be respectable lodgings, though like most lodgings in London, of rather unprepossessing exterior, Fanny and Major Bolton drove off

together to Florence's old address. There of course they did not find her, however, so greatly were they shocked by the poverty-stricken aspect of the neighbourhood, that they were almost relieved to find she had moved out of it some time before; but then arose the difficulty how to find her, for the poor widow did not in the least know where she had gone to, indeed Florence had taken pains that she should not, for in her new abode she was only known as Miss Lavington, and she did not wish any confusion to arise from her being asked for under any other name by old friends.

"She is sure to be coming this way soon though, ma'am, and I will give Miss Berkeley any message you want."

But neither Fanny nor Major Bolton were at all satisfied with this; they wanted to see Florence at once, so they recollected Mrs. Cholmondeley's address, and thinking she would be sure to know where Florence was, told the cabman to drive there.

"Mrs. Cholmondeley is dead, ma'am, dead some months ago," said the maid, looking rather surprised at the question put in the every day tone, "Is Mrs. Cholmondeley at home?"

"Dead!" exclaimed Fanny, "oh poor dear Florrie! then she has got no friend now. But perhaps you can tell us where Miss Florence Berkeley is living, she is sure to have come very often to see Mrs. Cholmondeley."

"There was only one young lady that came often. Mrs. Cholmondeley died in her arms."

"Yes, yes, that was Florence of course. Where does she live?"

"But that was Miss Lavington, ma'am, the celebrated actress."

"An actress! oh, of course one of Mrs. Cholmondeley's theatrical friends, but surely you must remember my sister, Miss Berkeley, beautiful with deep blue eyes."

"And a sweet, pale face?" asked the maid,

who was no other than Jane, Florence's particular friend.

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Fanny again, "with a sweet pale face. That was my sister, you remember her now."

"But it was Miss Lavington, ma'am, that I meant; she was a beautiful young lady with deep blue eyes and brown hair, and such a sweet face as it did one good to see."

"Very strange, is it not, Harry!" said Fanny, with a look of wonder. "That is exactly Florence's description, is it not?"

"Very likely the maid has confused the name of Lavington with Berkeley, you see she says it was some time ago. She may have forgotten."

"It is not likely I should forget Miss Lavington's name, sir," said Jane indignantly, "when the whole town is talking of nothing else, and there was no Miss Berkeley ever came here to see Mrs. Cholmondeley."

"She must have been ill too at the time. Oh, if she should be dead!" gasped out Fanny.

"Why, Fanny, it is not like you to be so down-hearted. Very likely she had gone at last to stay with those Welsh friends of hers, or perhaps Lord Bulmer may have made it up with her."

"Lord Bulmer called once to see Miss Lavington, sir. I remember the name, for he was the only lord I ever opened the door to. There was another lord came once or twice, but I was told never to let him in, and except while Miss Lavington was here, we have had no lords," said Jane with an air of dignity. She evidently considered it a recommendation to the lodgings, that they had ever had lords knocking at them, and yet more that any of the lords should have been refused admittance.

"Perhaps you can give us Miss Lavington's address, she may be able to tell us where to find Miss Berkeley, as they were

both friends of Mrs. Cholmondeley's," said Major Bolton.

"No Miss Berkeley ever came here, but yet I have heard the name before. I know I have, though I can't remember when," said Jane evidently puzzling her brain.

"Well, never mind about that now. Can you tell me Miss Lavington's address?"

"It is in a Square, sir, I know that, and my mistress could tell you where, but she is out now, and I can't remember the name of the Square. It is number sixteen, I know that, and it is in a Square, but I cannot remember which Square."

"When will your mistress be home?"

"She won't be home till late, sir, for she has gone out to tea with some friends, and then she is going to the Theatre to hear Miss Lavington act, but if you like to call again to-morrow, sir, I will take care to know Miss Lavington's address by then."

"Very well, I will call to-morrow."

Then the Boltons drove back to their lodgings again, and Fanny clasped her hands, and said: "You may think me absurd, Harry, but I have an awful feeling that I shall never see little Flo again. That was such a dreadful part of the town, she had been living in, and she had been ill, you know, and Mrs. Cholmondeley is dead, and Flo never went to see her all the time she was dying. I am sure Flo is dead too."

"I don't call you absurd," said Major Bolton, after pulling at his long moustache for a moment or two, trying to find some comfort for her, for he also felt depressed, and therefore could not give comfort easily, "but I must remind you that that poor widow, with whom Florence was lodging once upon a time, talked of having seen her quite lately, and seemed to expect to see her soon again."

"To be sure, I had forgotten that. How foolish I am! but somehow it seems so

strange to be back in England again, and to have no one to welcome us, and I do so long to see dear little Flo."

"I don't wonder," said Major Bolton, again measuring the length of his moustache. "Though she was too good to take to me much, I got quite fond of her in the little I saw of her. There was a wonderful charm about her little quiet ways. By the way I never told you, Fanny, that when I went into Curzon's room, as he was packing up to come on leave, I saw a picture, that he was stowing away among his valuables, with a wonderful likeness to her, and when I remarked on it, he blushed like any school girl. I knew he was awfully smitten with her the day of our wedding, but I had never fancied Florence had made such a lasting impression. By Jove, talk of the devil—if here is not Curzon himself. Here stop, stop, stop, I say," and with much rattling of an umbrella, and many indignant shouts, accompanied by wholly ineffectual

tugs at what ought to have been the check string, the cab was finally brought to a standstill, and in a twinkling Major Bolton was out of it, and standing upon the pavement, warmly grasping Captain Curzon's hand, and then there was the English greeting of "How are you, old fellow?" and "You here in England, Bolton! Mrs. Bolton too!" upon which followed all the rapid interchange of questions and answers, that usually takes place between old friends, who have been separated only for a few months. If the separation has extended to years, the greeting may be just as cordial, but the questions never follow so rapidly on one another. But Captain Curzon and the Boltons had been separated just the right time, and so when the former readily accepted Major Bolton's invitation to jump in and go home with them in their cab, there was a perfect volley of questions to be asked and answered about the regiment and the depôt, till at last the cab stopped at the Boltons' door.

Then Captain Curzon did not seem equally ready to accept their next invitation to dinner.

"Well, you see I am going to the play," he said; "I promised to meet Beresford there, and I tell you what, Mrs. Bolton, you had better come too," and again while he said this Captain Curzon, strong limbed giant though he was, blushed like any girl.

"I think a quiet evening would be more in my way, thank you," said Fanny laughing at herself for saying so, even while she said it, for what would 'fascinating Fan,' or the 'Season Ticket' of old days have thought of a quiet evening? But Mrs. Bolton was quite different. "What are you going to see?"

"It's Noblesse Oblige, that is all the rage now. No one ever thinks of going anywhere else."

"What is the attraction? A pretty actress, eh, Curzon?"

"Pretty! the most beautiful creature I

ever saw. I never knew any one the least like her except—except—" and Captain Curzon stammered and blushed, he seemed very much given to blushing that day.

"What is her name?" asked Fanny quickly.

"Miss Lucia Lavington. Oh, you should go to see her, Mrs. Bolton, I am sure you would like her."

"Not to-night, thank you. I had rather rest to-night. You will come and see us soon, won't you?"

"Yes, look in upon us some time to-morrow, old fellow," said Major Bolton, and then the Boltons went in to dinner, and Captain Curzon drove off at a tremendous pace to the New Theatre. His recent drive had rather taken him away from it, and he also was head over ears in love with the beautiful actress.

"We seem to hear of nothing but Miss Lavington," said Major Bolton, pulling his long moustache meditatively, while they

waited for dinner, which was no more punctual in their lodgings than in any other. "I only wish we could hear half as much of Florence."

"Yes, so do I," said Fanny sighing. "If Captain Curzon ever did care for her, he does not seem to be very constant, for I am sure he is in love with this actress now."

Next day Major Bolton went again to Mrs. Cholmondeley's old lodgings, and tried to hear news of Miss Berkeley, but failed. However he got Miss Lavington's address, and without delaying any longer, then hurried home again to fetch Fanny. Directly he went away Jane remembered when she had first heard the name of Miss Berkeley. "To be sure it was when that lord as I let in came. He was bothering to know Miss Berkeley's address. Well, he seemed just as well pleased with Miss Lavington, when he got her, so perhaps this other will be too," and having made this reflection Jane went on with her day's work with a mind quite at rest.

As soon as they thought it late enough in the morning to trouble a stranger, the Boltons walked off to the quiet Square; they walked, for they were very saving of cab hire as of everything else now. Indeed though Mrs. Bolton was very different from the Fanny of old days, I think both she and Major Bolton would very readily have gone to the theatre the night before, if it had not been that they shrank from every unnecessary expense, with that weight of debt still hanging over them, and two children dependent on them now. But that being the case they walked to Miss Lavington's, though the day was hot and oppressive, and the walk anything but pleasant.

"Is Miss Lavington at home?" asked Major Bolton, when they arrived at the quiet Square, and had there found number sixteen.

"I will see, sir, if you will give me your card."

Then the next moment there was a cry

of delight and Florence herself came running down the stairs, but Florence grown so much more beautiful, they would hardly have known her, if she had not been so very glad to see them. There was a rapturous greeting, and then they were led in triumph into the little sitting room, and made to explain their coming home and taking her so by surprise, and for a few minutes after that nothing would persuade Florence that Major Bolton was not still an invalid, and she wanted him to lie down upon the sofa, and be made much of; but after a little, and after she had looked at him once or twice, she began to believe that the sea air had worked a cure, and that he might be allowed to sit up, and behave like other people, and then Fanny exclaimed:

"How fortunate we have been to find you here at Miss Lavington's. It was Harry's good idea that she might know your address, but we never expected to find you here yourself. Are you living with her now?"

"I am living here," said Florence, and on the instant she grew very grave, and Fanny thought she was thinking of her friend Mrs. Cholmondeley, with whom she had lived so much of late, and was sorry she had said anything to chill the first joy of their meeting, so she tried to turn it off merrily as was her way. "We seem to have heard of nothing but this Miss Lavington, since we landed in England, I suppose she is very wonderful, but certainly an actress is the last person I expected to come home and find you living with. It strikes me that in spite of all your demure ways, you have a little wildness in your nature too, and require looking after quite as much as other people, so it is a good thing Harry and I have come home to take that office on ourselves." But though Fanny spoke gaily, and smiled a smile, that was still merry in spite of all her troubles, Florence neither smiled nor spoke, and looked graver than ever.

"What beautiful flowers!" said Major

Bolton, stooping over those on the table. He saw the conversation was going wrong, but not being able to see what was the matter with it, did not know how to turn it aright. "I have not seen anything like them all the time I have been in Mauritius. The flowers there are beautiful, but English hot-house flowers beat everything. Where did you get them?"

Again Florence began to answer and then stopped. "They are very beautiful," at last she said evasively, and they saw a tear rolling down her cheek, and noticed that her voice trembled. What could be the matter? Could it be that the surprise had been too much for her?

"You seem to me very much changed," said Fanny; "let me look at you," and she laid her hands on her sister's shoulders, and gazed into the pale perfect face. "Somehow I hardly think you are little Flo any longer," she said after a while.

"No, I am not little Flo any longer,"

said Florence in quiet despairing tones. She had not expected them home so soon; one month more, and she could have talked of her actress life as a thing of the past; now she did not know, how she could ever bring herself to tell them, and yet every moment, that she did not do so, she felt as if she were playing a hypocrite's part, but she could not tell them now. "How are Tottles and baby," she said at last, when the silence had already lasted so long it was beginning to grow oppressive.

"Oh they are flourishing. I am longing to exhibit them, will you come with us now at once to see them?"

"Yes, I should like to very much, I will go and put on my bonnet," and then Florence hurried out of the room anxious to collect her thoughts.

"I don't quite think she liked my chaffing her about her actress friend, she always used to be a little particular about what she was chaffed about," said Fanny.

"I don't think it was that," and Major Bolton pulled his long moustache. But he did not proffer an opinion as to what it was, for he could not make it out at all, and under those circumstances the Major was very chary of expressing an opinion.

When Florence came down again with her bonnet on, she seemed more herself, and she went back to their lodgings with the Boltons, and seemed quite herself, as she played with the children; and she asked Fanny and Major Bolton many questions about their voyage, and about all they had been doing; but whenever they asked her any questions in return, she seemed to become uneasy again and unlike herself, so they tacitly determined to put off these questions for a day or two, till they had all grown more at home with each other; and thus they were getting on very well together, when about six o'clock she surprised them by saying she must go home.

"Oh, you will stay to dine with us. Of

course I counted on your staying to dine with us," said Fanny almost indignantly.

"I should like to very much, but I have an engagement. I must go."

"Cannot your engagement be put off? What is it?"

"To go to the theatre," said Florence, looking more uneasy than ever, "and it is an engagement I must keep, so please don't be vexed, Fanny."

"Well, if you must keep it, I suppose you must; but is that the theatre Miss Lavington is acting at?"

"Yes—yes, it is the theatre Miss Lavington is acting at," and Florence grew red all over.

"Is she acting to-night?"

"Yes—yes, she is acting to-night."

"I think I shall go and see her then," said Fanny, "that is to say if Harry will. Every one seems mad about her, and as she is your friend—"

"Oh, Harry won't go, will he?"

"My dear Florence, don't look so wild. What is the matter? Do you not want me to go?"

"Any night but this! any night but this!" and Florence covered her face with her hands, and Fanny thought she heard a groan, but she could not be quite sure, because the next minute Florence looked up with a bright laughing face. "Don't you see, Fanny, as Miss Lavington is my friend, I could always get you an order, only to-night I have not time. I thought you told me you were grown so economical, but I see you are just as extravagant as ever."

The manner was very light and playful, but it did not satisfy Fanny, who had never seen Florence so light and playful before, and did not understand this new manner, though it seemed to sit very naturally upon her sister. But she had not really intended to go to the theatre that night, having only thrown out the idea to see if she could make out, what mystery there was about

Florence's going to it; for that there was some, she was sure. She was more than ever convinced of this now, but she saw she was paining her sister, so she thought she would remain in her ignorance a little longer, and readily consented to wait till Florence could get her a private box at the New Theatre.

"There is something very wrong with Florence," said Major Bolton oracularly after the dinner things had been cleared away.

"You think so too," said Fanny with a sigh.

"I am sure of it. But you have arranged to go and see her to-morrow morning, have you not? You had better go alone then, and try, if you can, to get out of her what it is. If you cannot, I don't know who can, and there is certainly something very wrong with her."

"I am afraid there is," said Fanny.

CHAPTER XIII.

"SHE NEVER CAN BE MINE."

That night when Florence refused to dine with Fanny and Major Bolton, there was to be a grand supper after the performance at the New Theatre. Florence had been to one of these suppers before, she found it impossible to refuse all invitations of the kind, unless she was content to be considered proud and unfriendly, and disliked accordingly by all the rest of the theatre company, but she felt less inclined for it than ever, after this first interview with her sister and brother-in-law, when what disgrace there was to her in being an actress

was weighing more heavily on her than ever. Strange, it was for their sakes, and because of them she had gone upon the stage, and yet she had never felt so sorry for having done so, as now after having seen them again. She was thus particularly disinclined for the society of actors and actresses, and indeed on that night she felt hardly friendly towards them, so it was a great relief to her to find Percy Gordon and Bertram Beresford of the party. But Captain Curzon was of the party also, and it seemed to Florence that every thing on that night was destined to recall the day of her sister's wedding to her. She trembled when she saw him, knowing how great a friend he was of Major Bolton's, and thinking they would most probably very soon be seeing each other, and that thus she should be betrayed, for she thought the young giant would be sure to recognise her.

But though Captain Curzon had fallen in love with Florence Berkeley the one

day he had seen her, and had now again fallen in love with Lucia Lavington at first sight, yet it did not occur to the thick-headed good-hearted young giant to put two and two together, and think they were one and the same. He took for granted that this young lady, to whom he was now presented under that name, was really Lucia Lavington, and no one else, and he did not trouble himself at all about her name, but troubled himself a good deal, because she would hardly vouchsafe him a single word, and turned away from him so pertinaciously.

He heard Percy Gordon making pretty poetical speeches, as he asked leave to call upon her next day at five, and worse still as he obtained leave to do so, and murmuring in his sweet beguiling tones, "And then you will be alone," and he heard Bertram Beresford talking *con amore* about the last blue book on the state of the poor in general, and those in workhouses in particu-

lar, and he saw Miss Lavington listening, apparently quite as much interested as the speaker, and he knew he had nothing so well worth saying, as what these two men had, but still he felt it a little hard not to be allowed to say anything, and he had an indignant swelling at his heart, as he thought that he would be a match for either of them hand to hand, and could throw either of them in a wrestling match. Poor stupid young giant that he was, as if that were at all to the point, or in the least proved which was the better man in these days, when needle guns or Snider rifles decide the victory, even when people do come to real downright fighting, and when brute force has nothing to do with it, and even courage very little. He knew himself it was nothing to the point, but still he stood by swelling with a sort of injured pride, and disliking the two men cordially, whilst he heard them both talking away to Miss Lavington, and himself was only

allowed to see the back of her head, and to listen as an outsider.

But these unchristian feelings disappeared, and he felt just as friendly as ever to Bertram Beresford, when the two men sat smoking together in Beresford's smoking-room before taking leave of each other for the night, for Captain Curzon was a thoroughly good-hearted fellow, as everyone, who knew him, knew, and never could bear malice long.

After a long silence between them, and after they had settled themselves down to their cigars, it was Captain Curzon, who spoke first, speaking, as men mostly do speak first, not of what he had most at heart. He was sitting on a straight cane-bottomed chair, which he had chosen out for himself, apparently with much care, in preference to any of the comfortable fauteuils, in which the room mostly dealt, and he had placed himself in that uncomfortable horsey attitude natural to some men, who look as though they had been designed by nature never to

sit elsewhere than in the saddle, and this was what he said: "So you want your governor to consent to your selling out, Beresford; won't you be a little sorry to be only a civilian after all?"

"Not in the least," said Bertram smiling at his friend's professionally arrogant 'only.' "All the eldest sons of my father's family, not to speak of many of the younger ones, have always been in the Grenadiers from time immemorial, and so I know it will vex the dear old boy a little, but he will come round soon, I hope, for he dotes upon my mother, and her family have always been in the Cabinet, and Linda and I take more after her family than after the Beresfords."

"By Jove, you are beginning to use big words already. I think I shall be afraid to came and see you, when you are prime minister, Beresford."

"You need not, for I shall be just as glad to see you then as now," said the other loftily, without an idea that Captain Curzon

had as good reason to smile now at the arrogance of his age, or rather of his youth, as Bertram himself had had but a moment before to smile at the pride of the other in his profession. But Captain Curzon was in no mood for smiling; with a great exertion of his huge body he worked himself into a yet more uncomfortable and more horsey attitude, leaning forward as if to ease his horse by giving her her head for a little, and then he started off at a tangent from the last subject discussed.

"So Miss Lavington has refused Mincington after all! people all said she would have him, but I did not think so myself, did you, Beresford?"

"No, I knew she would not. She is in love with Gordon," said Bertie shortly. He was standing very erect by the mantelpiece, and now he turned away for a second to brush off his cigar ash, as he spoke.

"No, now I don't think so," was Captain Curzon's answer, very slowly and oracularly

delivered, as the giant was wont to express his opinions, whenever he had any. "It is too much 'glad to see you' with Gordon. I would rather have the way in which she turned to you and said, 'Will it pass the Lords do you think, Captain Beresford? I always look to you for the earliest political news.' Yes, I had far rather have that."

"Oh, that is nothing," said Bertie indifferently, "She knows I am interested in politics, just as well as you do, but Gordon goes to see her at her house, and no other man does that."

"Yes, he is going there to-morrow," said Captain Curzon with a sigh. "I heard him make the appointment."

And then the two men, though they were both such good fellows, yet thought a few things about Gordon, which they were both still too good fellows to put into words, and after that they shook hands, and said good-night, as if they did not look upon each other as rivals at all. For though each

knew, what he felt towards Miss Lavington, and was pretty well sure that the other felt much the same, yet neither thought he had a chance himself. But though neither thought he had a chance himself, and so there was no real rivalry between them, yet Captain Curzon thought he had detected signs of favour in her behaviour towards Bertram, and Bertram had long ago decided that Curzon was just the man for the pale beautiful actress, sated with the admiration of worthless, though gilded, butterflies to fall back upon, and rest on; and thinking so he had himself presented him to her, for he had never thought he had a chance himself.

And they were both pretty well right about their own chances just then, for indeed Florence was not troubling her head at all about either of them, as having got home, she sat for hours by the open window of her little sitting-room, trying to get a breath of fresh air, before she closed it

and went upstairs to bed. She was thinking, as she sat there, what Percy Gordon could have to say to her next day alone, and why he should say, 'alone,' when he had never found anyone with her yet. It must surely be about Mrs. Northwey, that he wished to speak at last, and that 'alone' must have been meant to prepare her; and Florence racked her brain to think what she could say, when he should ask her, what she had meant by her interference. She could not think how she should speak of the subject with him, and she wished it were over, and that if she and Percy were to quarrel at last about Mrs. Northwey, or anything else, the quarrel itself were over, for it would be very painful to her, whatever it might be to him. Then too besides the pain she might intend inflicting, it was very inconvenient to her his coming to-morrow, and wanting to see her alone. She would have to act again afterwards, and what excuse could she make to Fanny for

being so little with her? She will think I do not care for seeing her, when I am so very glad, if only"—began poor Florence to herself, and then she stopped. In truth she did wish Fanny had not come home quite so soon. "I cannot tell her to-morrow," she said to herself. "With this interview with Percy hanging over me in the afternoon, I should never be able to act in the evening, if I had any more excitement to go through. Even now I don't feel as if I could ever act, it all tires me so to think of, and of course I must act—yes, of course I must act," she repeated to herself, as she went slowly up the stairs to bed, and then she reflected to herself, that if Captain Curzon had not recognised her, and she did not think he had, Fanny would never know that she really was Miss Lavington, till she herself went to the New Theatre, and saw her act, which she was not going to do, till Florence got her an order, so she might still take her time about telling her sister.

And she needed to take her time about telling her. On a more generally excitable nature this continual acting might not have told so much as on Florence's immensity of repressed feeling, ordinarily forced into outward calm. It was telling fearfully upon her, now that she was forced to bring out to the surface the feelings which hitherto she had curbed in so resolutely, and she had got the feelings, she felt all her own acting far more than the most impressionable of her audience; if she had not done so, she could not have affected them so much. But this working up her feelings was wearing her out, she had looked like a beautiful woman all that evening, but she was like a tired child now as she undressed alone in her own room, with the big tears rolling slowly down her cheeks one after another, not from sorrow, she was not exactly sorry about anything just then, unless that the Boltons had not delayed a little longer before coming

home, but from sheer exhaustion, and incapacity to restrain her tears.

Next morning she was on the look out for Fanny, and ran down herself, and opened the door for her, so afraid was she of any communication with the servants, which might betray who Miss Lavington really was. Indeed it was as well she took this precaution, for Fanny had come determined to find out what was wrong with her, and would not have been above getting information from anyone; but before she set to work, as she thought she might take some time about it she began by saying, "I hope my coming here does not prevent Miss Lavington from coming in—is not inconvenient in any way."

"Oh, no," said Florence, "it is not at all inconvenient, and I hope you are going to stay some time, for there are so many things to talk about."

"Yes, are there not? But first do tell me what sort of a person this wonderful Miss

Lavington is, I suppose you got to know her through Magdalene Cholmondeley."

"Yes, yes, through Magdalene—I first heard her name from her," and Florence again became as confused as the day before; then seeing her sister waiting for an answer to the other part of her question, and looking very gravely, and more searchingly at her than was quite agreeable, she recovered herself, and spoke in the same playful manner, that had surprised Fanny the day before. "I daresay I don't think quite so much of her, as other people do—perhaps from knowing her so well."

"Yes, of course," said Fanny, "that is always said to be the way, though I cannot say I have found it so myself, some people seem to grow dearer and dearer the more one sees of them. But tell me, Flo, how does it happen that you were not with Mrs. Cholmondeley, when she died?"

"I was with her," said Florence sadly, "as much as possible. Not so much as I

could have wished certainly, but as much as I could, and she was unconscious all the last few days, so she never missed me. She was only conscious again just before she died, and then I was with her, and she died in my arms."

"Why the maid said it was in Miss Lavington's, and that you had never been near the house at all."

"I daresay she took me for Miss Lavington, we are rather like each other, and very likely she did not know us apart," said Florence, as naturally as possible. She had determined she was not going to tell Fanny that morning, and she did not intend to betray herself; with her knowledge of acting, it would be strange if she could not feign a little, now when she wished to do so on her own account.

Then they talked of Mrs. Cholmondeley for a long time, and Florence dwelt much on what a good kind friend she had been to her, and what a fortunate thing her former

kindness to Mrs. Cholmondeley at Ryde had in the end turned out for herself, and seemed altogether much more willing to talk of her, than of her present friend Miss Lavington, of whom she did not seem to have a very high opinion, Fanny thought; and in all this Fanny could not find out that there was anything wrong, but she still could not get rid of the impression that something was wrong, so now she tried another tack.

"How came you to be living in such wretched lodgings, Flo, before you moved here?" she asked.

"I could not afford better," said Florence simply, and this time perfectly truly. "I had been spending more in that sisterhood, than I could afford, and I had altogether been too lavish with my money to have much left for myself."

"Dear Flo, I hope it was not that seventy pounds, you lent us. Harry has been so unhappy about it."

"Oh no, it was not only that. I hope

Harry is not very unhappy about his debts now."

"He bears up under them much better than he did. Really at one time I used to be afraid he might blow his brains out some day, he got so terribly down in the mouth, but you know it is very dreadful. There might be a writ out against him any day, and then—oh, but I won't think of it before hand, only it is a terrible thing being poor, Flo dear."

"Yes, terrible," said Florence softly, "and it is not so bad for oneself, but to think of those one loves suffering—one would do almost anything to get rich then, would not one, Fanny?"

"Anything that was not positively wrong," said Fanny decidedly, "and at one time I would have done anything, I think," and from that time they talked of nothing but the Boltons' difficulties and prospects, which seemed very bad indeed, even according to brave-hearted Fanny's account, and Fanny

quite forgot to try to find out any more what was wrong with Florence, for Florence was only her sister, while Harry was her husband, and his difficulties were very pressing.

"Don't be unhappy about it, Fanny, for I hope to have more money than I shall quite know what to do with soon," said Florence, gently.

"Dear Flo, you ought to tell me now I am here, who is it?"

"Who is what, Fanny?"

"Who is it, you are going to marry of course, you silly child?"

"I am not going to marry anybody," said Florence, raising her deep blue eyes open wide in simple child-like surprise, "and Fanny, you must not talk to me in that way please. I do not want to marry anyone."

"But surely you were going to—I thought from your letters,—now confess, have you not had an offer very lately?"

"Yes, I have had an offer lately, but I

refused it of course. I could not bear the man."

"Could you not really? Was he rich?"

"Yes, he was rich, and a splendid *parti*, as people say, but I never liked him, and I only let him offer to me, because I could not get rid of him in any other way. I do not wish ever to marry."

Then Fanny thought no more of Florence's saying she should soon have more money than she should know what to do with, and after they had talked a little longer, still always of Fanny's own concerns, she went home, as she had already left her children longer than she had intended, and Florence went home with her, and played a little with Tottles and baby, who were fretful with the heat, and seemed to require amusing, and then said she was tired, and went home again by herself. Indeed she was tired, and she had still got the interview with Percy Gordon to go through before acting in the evening; she must rest a little first.

"I love aunt Flo," said Tottles, as he put up his little face to kiss her, and baby looked as if he would have said as much, only his vocabulary did not extend quite far enough.

"How beautiful she is!" thought Fanny, "everyone must love her, the children take to her at once, and everyone must. It is all nonsense her talking about not marrying, of course she will some day, but I see we must not look to her for any help now. Of course it never was fair to do so, and I am so sorry about that seventy pounds; I must not tell Harry though, for it would drive him wild to think she had been suffering from poverty, at all through our fault. Poor dear Flo! but I am afraid she must be a bad manager, and of course it was a silly thing her going into that sisterhood, when she could not afford it. She ought to be able to live quite well on a hundred a year, when there is only herself," so thought Fanny who had a husband and children, and almost as large debts as income, and who still had managed

up to this time to keep her own head, and the heads of those belonging to her above water; speaking of course without any recollection of how as a young lady, living in Lord Bulmer's house, with three hundred a year, and no rent to pay, nor any housekeeping bills, she had yet incurred considerable debts on her own account before marrying Major Bolton. Now Florence had never owed anyone anything, though she had suffered considerable privations to avoid doing so, just as Fanny had likewise, since she had become a wife.

Major Bolton had come in, while Fanny was upstairs putting the children to bed, and when she came down again, she was shocked and surprised to find him with his elbows on the table, his head propped up by his hands, apparently in one of his old fits of depression, which she had hoped gone for ever.

"What is gone wrong now, Harry?" she exclaimed.

He groaned. "What is wrong with

Florence?" he said without uncovering his face; "Have you found that out?"

"No, I begin to think there is nothing, that we have only imagined a mare's nest."

"Have we?" cried Major Bolton, and he groaned again.

"Dear Harry, you frighten me. What is it? Do you know?"

"Yes, I know," he said, uncovering his face now, and after pacing up and down the room once or twice, standing still suddenly, and looking his wife full in the face. "I know; she is Miss Lavington."

"Dear Harry, you must be mad."

"I am not mad," said Major Bolton fiercely. "I tell you I have been at the club to-day, and heard men talking of her, and describing her, and I have seen her photograph. And did not the maid say Miss Berkeley had never been near Mrs. Cholmondeley, and that Miss Lavington had always been there, and Mrs. Cholmondeley died in her arms?"

"Yes, but Florence says it was the maid's mistake between them, that she was there."

"She was there, true enough, I don't doubt that. But the maid has made no mistake between them, for they are one and the same, and Florence is this wonderful actress every one is raving about, and do you know why she has stooped so low? I know Florence, at least, I think I do, and there was only one motive, that would have made her do anything so repulsive to her nature, as to go upon the stage, and it is all my doing, and because of my debts," and the miserable man groaned once more, and folding his arms upon the mantel-piece, buried his face in his hands again. "You have borne a good deal for my sake, Fanny, can you bear this new degradation, I have brought upon your family, can you forgive me this too?"

"Oh, Harry, how you talk," exclaimed Fanny indignantly, passing an arm round him, and trying to raise his forehead, that

she might kiss it, "do you call it a degradation? If Florence has done this, and done it for our sakes, I call her a ten times nobler creature, than I ever thought her before, for I know how much it must have cost her, my dear, dear little Flo. Oh, but she never could have brought herself to do it, you must have dreamt it, Harry, for Florence never could. She would do a great deal for us, I know she would, dear little Flo, but she could never become an actress, that would cost her too much."

"Well, she has not shrunk from even that," said Major Bolton in a low hollow voice, but walking about the room now, as if he was too despairing even to care to hide his shame any longer. "As we have sown, so must we reap, but sometimes other people reap for us, and your sister Florence has reaped this of my sowing, though God knows I reap something too, and He only knows which is the bitterest cup."

"Flo's cup is not bitter, whatever she has

done," said Fanny quickly. "She still talks of being happy in her own way, which is provoking, but she talks of it, as if it were to be, and not any longer an impossibility, and with that sweet composed face I cannot call her unhappy."

"Yes, she smiles at grief," said Major Bolton bitterly, "but it is from such long acquaintance with it, she treats it like an old friend. I have heard men talking of her to-day, and they all say, they have never seen so sorrowful a face, that the only part she cannot act is, when she has to look happy at the end of the piece, that she almost always fails in that, but in all the rest of the piece she is perfect, and that it is a piece written for her face, and sorrowful throughout."

"Let us go at once to the theatre; I cannot rest in this uncertainty, I must see her act, and know if it is really herself."

"You forget we have no money."

"No, to be sure I forgot, but I feel, as if I could not wait till to-morrow, and yet now

I think of it, she would not talk of Miss Lavington at all, said she did not think she thought so much of her as other people seemed to. So unlike Flo to depreciate anyone, and then, oh then I remember she talked of soon having more money, than she should know what to do with."

"Exactly so," said Major Bolton, and he groaned again, but for the last time, for now Fanny put her arm round him, and taking hold of his hand in hers looked up into his face and said:

"Harry, I am ashamed of you. If Florence has been great enough to make this sacrifice for our sakes, and we both know what it must have cost her, are we not to be great enough to accept it, when it is made? It would have been different of course, if we had known of it beforehand, but now when it is made, are we to be so little minded as to be crushed under the obligation? We may be sorry for what we have done to render it necessary, but we have

been sorry for that for a long time now, do not let us spoil her pleasure, when she is expecting to make us happy, by thinking only of the price at which she has gained this happiness for us. Let us be happy, if it be only for Florence's sake, who has done so much for us."

Major Bolton said nothing, but he stooped and kissed his wife more than once, and the last time he kissed her, he murmured: "God bless you, Fan," and then he took up his hat and went out.

When he came in again, he said: "I thought I might as well make it quite certain, as you do not like uncertainty, so before I came in I went to Florence's house, and no Miss Berkeley lives there, only Miss Lavington, and she is out now acting at the New Theatre."

"Dear Florence," and a tear twinkled in Fanny's bright blue eye, which she tried hard to brush away before her husband saw it, but he said gravely:

"Don't pretend not to be sorry, Fanny, for you know you are—very."

"It is so strange," said Fanny in a husky voice; "I have known but one saint all my life, and that was little Flo, and now I can't understand her having stepped out of the niche I had made for her in my mind, and become an actress. It seems like desecration, does not it, Harry?"

"Yes, it seems like it," said Major Bolton gravely, "but I never heard that saints were exempt from the trials and temptations of this life, only that they passed through them differently to other people, and that I suppose is the way with Florence."

"At that rate we may all be saints, Harry, even you and I, for I am sure we have had trials and temptations enough."

"And you are not far off it, if I am any judge," muttered Major Bolton; "but I never thought to call my wife a saint, and perhaps least of all did I think I should

ever consider that I was paying her a compliment by doing so."

But by this time Fanny was fairly crying, so she ran out of the room without making any attempt to answer this last remark, for though she had done her best to comfort Harry under the obligation, and did mean to be great enough to accept her little sister's sacrifice, yet she was very sorry, notwithstanding, that Florence should have felt called upon to make it. So she cried a little by herself upstairs, and then hung over her sleeping children, and thought how they would get the good of the sacrifice without any of the pain, and came downstairs again greatly comforted, only reproaching herself for all the additional grief she feared she had inflicted upon Harry, but he smiled as she came in, and said: "I am almost glad to see my wife is not so very great yet. I don't quite know how I should get on with such a heroine."

CHAPTER XIV.

ONLY BY A WORD.

Florence went home from Fanny's lodgings, and lay down upon the sofa, and tried to rest, but thought instead, a very different business with people, who can think, which by-the-way not one in a hundred can do. Florence however could, and therefore this exercise of thinking tired her, still she had to think, as it seemed to her. In those days it seemed to her, she had to do many things, so she lay on the sofa and thought. She had succeeded very well in not betraying herself that morning, but she determined she would not carry on her deception any longer, but tell all next day. She had only put it off till then, because she knew the

disclosure would be an agitating one, and she did not feel equal to much agitation, while acting every night was taking so much out of her, and going hard to ruin the sweet composure, that had so long been one of her greatest charms. Florence felt she could no longer control herself, as she had once been able to do; she had got this interview with Percy before her, and she must keep herself for that, but next day she must tell Fanny all, she would not put it off any longer, not only because she felt herself playing a hypocrite's part, as long as she did so, but because having become an actress to save the Boltons from the misery of poverty, she longed to put them out of their misery, as soon as it was possible to do so.

"Poor things, how can they endure it?" she thought admiringly to herself. "Fanny has a wonderful spirit, I am afraid I should have been crushed long ago, but she never was frightened of papa in the old days when everyone else was, and now she does not

seem frightened by Harry's debts, though Harry himself is, and no wonder. Poor Harry, I think I like him better now, than I ever used to, but though Fanny says he is so much better and cheerier than he was, he seems very much crushed still. It is dreadful to see a man like that," and then Florence grew quite happy for a little, thinking of the great relief it would be to them, when she had put them quite straight, and she became feverishly impatient to tell them all, though all the while she knew that that telling all could not be a very pleasant process just at first, and then Percy Gordon was announced, before she had had any time to think of him and his visit, or even to rest in preparation.

Florence only just rose to receive him, and then sank back again into a corner of the sofa, while he sat down on a low chair beside her. He always sat on that chair now, and he had paid her so many visits, that it would have seemed quite unnatural to both of them, if he had taken any other.

"I wanted very much to see you alone to-day," he said.

"But you always do find me alone," she replied very timidly, for she knew not what was coming, and whatever it was, she dreaded it.

"Yes, but I particularly wished to do so to-day, and I wished to do so by your express permission, for there is something I must say to you."

"Yes," said Florence, and she thought to herself, "What is it? He looks very grave. Oh it is too dreadful, it must be about Mrs. Northwey." The last idea, that would have occurred to her mind, would have been, that he was about to make love to her, for besides being not at all prone even yet to think that of any man, Florence had long ago decided that though Percy certainly had a very lover-like manner — he had always had that, and probably it had grown like second nature to him now—he certainly could not be in love with herself, or he

would take more interest in her people and belongings, and ask more questions about them, instead of carefully avoiding the subject altogether, as it seemed to her, he always had done.

"It is hardly necessary for me to say what I want to tell you, my manner must have revealed it to you so fully long ago—from the first day I knew you. Indeed my feelings have never altered, since I first saw you some time before that in the New Theatre. But, oh Miss Lavington, you can never know, no one who has not felt it can ever imagine the intensity of my love for you. Indeed it would be more like adoration than love, were it not that I love you as passionately as intensely. From the first day I saw you, I seemed to know you quite well, what your sentiments would be, how you would talk, and move, and act, and I loved you then in a manner I could not understand, since I only really knew your face. Now I know *you*, and I love you yet more,

for you are all that I fancied you, and yet more perfect. Do not despise my love, nor think contemptuously of it, as having been offered to another first, it is a virgin heart that I offer at your feet, for I have never loved anyone, as I love you. Miss Lavington—Lucia, you will let me call you so, will you not? Can you love me a little in return for all the love I have poured forth at your feet?"

"Percy!"

He was almost kneeling before her in his passionate earnestness, he had clasped one of her hands in his, and his face was upturned towards hers with a look of such love and adoration on the beautiful features, as few women could have withstood, but it was all changed in a moment. What was there in that one word 'Percy' to effect such a transformation? In a moment he was on his feet, holding on to the back of a chair as if to steady himself, bending down gazing into her face with a look of such helpless

astonishment, as no one had ever seen on Percy Gordon's face before.

"I always thought you knew me, Percy. If I had known you had so entirely forgotten me—Florence Berkeley, I would have reminded you of her before, but I did not know that it was necessary."

She spoke very stilly, and softly, more as if she were apologising for herself than blaming him for anything that he had said, looking in his face too, humbly, pleadingly; but though her words were calm, and calmly spoken, she trembled all over while she spoke.

"Florence," said Percy, and there was an unutterable love and sadness in his tone, such as it went to her very heart to hear, "Why were we ever parted? I never loved anyone, as I loved you, till I met with yourself again. Though years had changed you so then, that I did not know you."

"We were not parted, Percy," said Florence, and again her voice was very soft

and still, but lower now, lower and less distinct, almost as if it was some one else speaking, or as if she were speaking for some one else far away, not herself speaking for herself.

"Will you visit that early treason on my head now? I was very sorely tried, Florence, and I never loved Evelyn—poor Evelyn!" he added after a moment's pause.

"Yes, poor Evelyn! she married you, but she did not have your love," murmured Florence; then louder, "No Percy, I will not visit that early treason on your head, I have heard something and guessed something, and I believe that you were sorely tried. You need not make excuses for yourself, for I have made them *all* for you—yes *all*." Here her voice trembled on a sob, but she checked herself in time, and after a moment's pause went on with a smile, a smile that was sadder than any tears could have been: "I have had plenty of time before now, yes, plenty of time, and I have

quite forgiven you—quite," she repeated firmly, and she held out her hand to him as she spoke. "I have quite forgiven you, and I shall always love you dearly—as a cousin."

"And no other way, Florence?"

"No; no other way, Percy. Not twice, I could not."

"So be it then," he said, and a blackness as of despair settled down over him. He knew he might plead for ever, but all pleading would be thrown away on that pale marble face, and indeed he could not plead after that fatal mistake, that he had made, of wooing the same woman twice, and yet wooing her as two. To Percy it seemed that that mistake once made must be fatal, and such as no woman could by any possibility ever get over, though Florence would have got over it, and easily, had that been all.

"God help me," he said, and turned to leave the room, but he came back once more. "For the old times' sake, Florence," he said, and bent over her pleading for just one kiss

from her perfect lips, now grown very rigid and almost ashy white, but which yet held all the sweetness of the world for him.

But she would not, she drew herself up, and said: "Not now, Percy—not now—I could not," and then she sank down upon the sofa, and fainted away, and he did not know it, for he had rushed from the room with the face of a madman.

How long she lay there insensible Florence never knew, but she had hardly roused herself, when the maid came in with dinner, much wondering to find her beautiful young mistress looking so ill. She could not eat anything, but she drank some wine, and then she hurried off to the theatre, and got there late for the first time.

That night she could not act, and her old admirers could not make it out at all, and those, who had not seen her before, vowed she was a hoax, and pretty enough certainly, but a mere stick at acting, and they supposed that when a piece had such an immense

run, the actors always did get wooden towards the end, and it could not be helped, only it was a pity any theatre should keep on with the same piece for so many nights as 'Noblesse Oblige' had been running. They supposed it paid, but it was getting money out of people on false pretences, for the piece was no longer what it had been, there being no acting in it any longer; and while they were making their comments, after it was all over, they did not know that Miss Lavington was at that moment in violent hysterics in the green room, and had to be taken home in the end almost insensible, worn out by the violence of her emotions.

She had kept her feelings down so long, crushed out their very existence so sternly, that when they did assert themselves at last, they were terrible, and Florence could not bear up against them. She did not wish anything unsaid in that interview with Percy, except those last words, she

wished she had not said them, she wished she had been able to kiss him just once as a cousin, but that she had not been able to do. She had loved him, and had ceased to love him, and forgiven him for forcing her to do so, but she could not kiss him now, when he had just been telling her, how he loved her, as he had never loved woman before. She had loved him so passionately, so tenderly, so truly, long ago at St. James's Cray, and he told her, he loved her now, as he had never loved her before, speaking of his old love for herself, together with his other loves, disparagingly, as though they had all been mere milk-and-water loves, and would not stand comparison with what he felt now. She could not help a little bitterness at her heart, and so she had denied him that last kiss; she was sorry for it now. Otherwise she did not regret anything, that she had said. She did not wish for a moment, that she could have accepted his love. It seemed to her such an awful

mockery of her old passionate longing for it, that it should be offered to her now, when she could not care for it. Once she would have given all but her soul, perhaps in some troubled moments even that too, to have had that love all poured forth at her feet, waiting, praying her acceptance, as now it had been. "*Was man in-der Jugend wunscht, hat man im Alter die Fülle.*" Florence had often pondered over that sentence, attributing to it many meanings, but hoping, always hoping that it meant 'What a man willeth with firm resolute will in his youth, that he is sure to accomplish before death,' and was in fact only a paraphrase of our English, 'Where there is a will, there is a way.' But now the German sentence came back to her, and she thought bitterly, "Yes, what one has wished for, one has enough of, enough certainly, but not till it has turned to dust and ashes, or worse still, not when it is only worthless, but when it is as wormwood, bitter and distasteful. Oh, but why,

why do I think of myself? Why do I not think of Percy? I would have died willingly to save him pain, for I love him still, I shall love him always, though not as I once used to, never like that again, and now I of all people have inflicted on him a pain, which I know, alas! too well, and know to be terrible, for oh! he does love me now! I shall never forget that look upon his face, when he knelt before me, looking up at me; he loves me really now, if he never loved me before, and I cannot love him now, I, who would yet die to save him pain."

She never asked herself if she could not love him yet. All through that weary night as she sat up in bed, staring out at the stars, and trying by every means to cool her fevered brow, she never once asked herself, if she could not love Percy Gordon, for she knew she could not, and with Florence to know a thing once was to know it for ever, she could not begin to doubt about it again.

As to Percy he did not look more like a madman than he felt, when he rushed from Florence's presence, and came out into the quiet Square, so exasperating in its calm respectability. He could not stand its quiet, and he jumped into his Tea-cart, and drove furiously to the park, and then almost mechanically drove up and down the ladies' mile, but still a trifle fast, and he chuckled to himself, as he did so. It was such an absurd mistake he had made, such a very absurd mistake! Percy himself would have been the first to laugh at it in the case of any other man, and so he laughed at it now in his own case, but he could have torn his hair, as he thought that but for this mistake, it might have been so different. If he had but gone to Florence Berkeley as her one time lover, and told her how being sorely tried he had married another woman, and thus been untrue, and yet he had never loved that other woman, nor any other woman, but always looked

back upon her as the one girl he had loved best, and that then meeting her again he had loved her with a tenfold love; if he had told her all this, if he had known all this, it might have been all so different. Thus Percy thought, and he ground his teeth, as he thought so.

But he little knew Florence, when he thought this. She knew quite well from the beginning that he was Percy Gordon, whom she had once loved better than she could ever love again, and she knew that she did not now love him, as she had once loved him. One of the most poetic of modern writers tells us 'that there is no pardon for desecrated ideals,' and so it was with Florence and Percy, he had been her ideal, and she could not forgive the desecration of her ideal even by himself, not quite; certainly she could never forget it. She might perhaps some day marry some other man with the lesser love, which was all she had to give now, but she could

never thus marry the man, she had once loved so well. Nothing could have made any difference now, except Percy's being different, and though Percy was different every day, and a hundred times a day, he must have been different in being the same man, in being one man, and not trying to be half a dozen; in this way must he have been different to make any difference in Florence's feelings towards him now.

Many people had thought Percy's character promised well at one time, but, whether they had been mistaken or not, it could never fulfil that promise now. He had always sunk before difficulties, not overcome them, and though like a cork he came to the surface again, yet each time of sinking he was losing some portion of his buoyancy, and each day was becoming more and more of a fair-weather vessel, and less and less of a sea-going craft, and fair-weather vessels do not count for much in this work-a-day world.

Percy Gordon had been at his best when beautiful, clever, young, and full of hope he had plighted his troth to Florence Berkeley at St. James's Cray; he had been at his second best, when tenderly and patiently he nursed the beautiful little wife, he had never been able to learn to love; but since then he had taken no fresh turn, but drifted more and more, doing not the right thing to be done, but the best thing to be done. Curious what a difference in meaning there is between these two phrases so alike in sound! Now that he had poured forth all his love, such as it was, pah! it is profanity to talk of such men's love, say rather all his passion at Miss Lavington's feet, and had heard it refused, and found Miss Lavington vanish away, and change into Florence Berkeley, the girl who had loved him with all her pure girl's heart, and whose life in return he had done his best to blight; now he drifted no longer slowly, but made straight for the whirlpool, to be sucked up

quickly, and thus made an end of. The quicker the better, Life was a weariness to him now.

He had failed to do the evil he had done his best to accomplish, yet without meaning or desiring to do it; he had failed, not so much because he was weak, as because Florence was strong, for no girl, if she strives aright, will have her life wrecked, because her early love has mis-carried, and let us be thankful for it in these days of liberty without freedom. Let us be thankful that though not one girl out of ten escapes from that school-room time of so-called safety heartwhole, yet no girl, who really means to do right, and has strength of will to carry out her intentions, need ever be spoiled by an unfortunate first love; let us be thankful for this, for first loves are mostly unfortunate. Yet not wholly so; Florence's character, no less than her face, would never have ripened into such beauty, as that to which it had now attained, had she not trusted

her all in her first love's keeping, and found her love unworthy. She was now the nobler for that love-shipwreck, thus out of evil had come forth good, but not for the doer of the evil, who had never striven at all, but only failed another.

Percy Gordon went down to his Club after that drive in the Park, and played—high of course, *cela va sans dire*, and as he played he said: "What has become of Northwey? Have none of you fellows seen Northwey lately? He is never about now."

"You are never about yourself, or you would not ask," said Lord Lansdon. "Northwey is gone mad."

"Gone mad, is he? By Jove, what a jolly thing? I should like to go mad myself. But what has become of his wife?"

"She is nursing him like another Lucretia, or Penelope, or whatever the model wife of ancient times was called. There was one once, I believe."

"Oh, nonsense now, that is not very

likely, unless she is gone mad too. There never used to be much love lost between them. I say, Lansdon, what do you say against Belshazzar? Ponies! Nonsense, make it centuries and I will take you up seven to one."

"Done," said Lord Lansdon, as he noted down the bet, in what looked a very workmanlike little book, for all the gay gold coronet glittering outside; but as he did so, he glanced across the billiard table at another man, and significantly touched his forehead.

"The Lavington?" said the other man, and winked, and laughed. Some men might have thought it was wine, but these two knew better. They knew well enough, how a man looked, when he had drunk too freely, and a little also how a man looked, when it was a great grief, not wine, that had unsettled his brain; racing men do get some little knowledge of the kind, though it is not much else, that is learnt upon the turf.

"Seems a refuser," said Lord Lansdon coolly. "Don't think I'll try my luck. Her *sang froid* must be about equal to my own, if neither Gordon nor Mincington can put a heat into it."

But all the same, when he went home that night, he wrote a very courteous offer to Miss Lavington, which she as courteously declined next morning, and no one was a bit the wiser; but he showed himself very scrupulously about for the next few days, for fear any one should have got wind of it, and he considered his much the best plan of offering. "No bones broken," as he said to himself, "but she must be *tête montée* to be refusing coronets right and left. If neither an Earl nor a Viscount will suit her, what Duke can she be waiting for? There is not an eligible Marquis between the four seas just at present." That was the way he looked at it, and after he thought he had shown himself about enough since his rejection, he went down to Scotland to try his

luck at the grouse, as he could not succeed with the ladies.

As for Percy Gordon he went away too, but not after the grouse ; no, he chose to go to Hombourg, just as a singed moth always loves to flutter into the very middle of the candle, for he was a singed moth already. Belshazzar broke his back at the very first fence from the grand stand the second time round, the jockey was carried off insensible, and though some people tried to make out he was likely to recover, he never spoke again and died a few days after. Nobody pitied the horse particularly, it was put out of its pain very quickly, but not so the men who had trusted their fortunes to it, nor taken the precaution to hedge, and more people broke their hearts over the horse's death, than over the jockey's, although the ladies were very compassionate of the latter, as they sipped their champagne, and all agreed "It was a great pity, had really quite spoilt their day's pleasure," as they drove home

through the pleasant evening, making pretty speeches about the poetical way, in which the last yellow rays of the setting sun lighted up the landscape, and wondering whether "that poor jockey," would ever see the like again. They talked of the "poor horse" too, but they did not pity it much, though many of them looked a trifle paler at the ball that evening, than they would have done, but for that "horrid accident," and those who had settled to wear green regretted it immensely, and the ladies in pink thought themselves fortunate. It was not the thing among the men to look pale, as it was among the ladies, though some few of them had a good deal more cause to, but they affected to laugh at the whole thing as an incident natural to steeplechases, and not in any way deserving to be made a fuss about. All the same they talked of the jockey, as if they were sorry for him, though they said quite among themselves they did not care a rap about his

death, it was the horse that mattered. And whether they pitied the horse, or no, some few of them cursed him pretty deeply, and it was after that race Percy Gordon started for Hombourg.

But before he went, like himself to the last, he drove off to the Northweys' house, not so much because he wanted to hear tidings of the little woman, and was sorry for her in this new trial, that had befallen her, as because he wanted sympathy, and was so accustomed to having hers for a long time now, that he felt the lack of it. But he found the pretty little house near the Park shut up, and only waiting to be let, and all he could make out from the stupid woman left in charge (why is it always stupid women that are left in charge of houses?) was, that the Northweys were living somewhere in the suburbs, but where she did not know, and that Mrs. Northwey was certainly with her husband, when they went away, and that he was certainly mad,

" but not vi'lent, sir. The servant as helped him away said, he was not near so vi'lent, as he had been pretty nigh allus affore. He seems to have been a real furious gent, if what they says is true."

And more than this, Percy could not get out of her, so in the end he started for Hombourg without the benefit of Mrs. Northwey's sympathy.

CHAPTER XV.

"SO TIRED, SO TIRED—MY HEART AND I."

Fanny and Major Bolton went together to see Florence the next day. They had settled it was best to do so together, they clung very much to each other, and they did not wish to act separately in anything now. They had borne many troubles together, and, now they would bear together this obligation, that they knew they would soon be under to Florence; they knew it was a benefaction she was going to bestow upon them, but just that day they would far rather that she should not have bestowed it upon them, yet they felt grateful to her, very grateful. Only sometimes gratitude is

very burdensome to the one gratified. So they walked through the hot sun, and entered the quiet Square, rather downcast, and were still rather downcast, when they knocked at number sixteen, and asked in the most natural manner possible, whether Miss *Lavington* would be able to see them; then they went upstairs trying to force a gaiety they did not feel, and prepared to be very grateful, though they were still very sorry for the need of gratitude.

They found Florence lying on the sofa, pale and exhausted. She did not even rise to receive them, but she smiled a sweet, shadowy smile, and seemed glad to see them, lying there quite still like a poor, broken lily.

"Are you ill, dearest?" asked Fanny.

"No, only tired, so very tired," Florence replied. "I feel as if I could sleep and sleep for ever, and yet I cannot sleep."

"Poor dear," said Fanny caressingly, "You are doing too much."

"Yes, I want rest, but I cannot get rest, and one thing after another happens to vex me."

She had just received Lord Lansdon's note, and was trying to answer it, when they came in. It did not vex her very much in itself, but these offers of love, that she could not accept, were becoming very dreadful to her.

After that speech Fanny and her husband looked at each other, and their look expressed that each thought it best not to tell her they knew all just at present. Her voice was so weak and tired, and she looked so worn out, and yet spoke so patiently, and smiled so sweetly, as she talked of one thing after another happening to vex her, that they had not the heart to add one more. But after a few minutes Florence herself plucked up spirit to begin the subject; she had resolved to tell them that day, and iron as ever, nothing that had happened yesterday should alter her resolution, so after they had

talked a little while about other things in a desultory manner, she looked up at them at last, looking more at Major Bolton perhaps, but addressing Fanny.

"I want you to give me a treat, Fanny. You know I told you the other day, I should soon have more money than I should know what to do with, and it has made me so miserable thinking of you as poor, when you two might be quite happy, you really might, if you were only not so poor, so I want you now to give me the treat of letting me pay all you owe still."

"Dear Flo!" exclaimed Fanny, and catching up her sister's hand she covered it with kisses, trying thus to hide the hot, impulsive tears, that would gush forth despite all her efforts to restrain them.

"My dear Florence," said Major Bolton, "you must not talk of it as a treat we are to give you. We know what you have done, and it makes us very unhappy that you should have had to do it for us, but

still we can never thank you enough, so you —you must not talk of it as a treat."

It cost Major Bolton a great deal to make that little speech, and thus accept Florence's sacrifice; he could not think much about the words, in which he did so.

"Yes, but I do call it a treat," said Florence eagerly, sitting up on the sofa now, and taking one of his hands in hers, "and I call it very noble of you, Harry, to thank me in this way, for I know how much it must pain you to accept, what it is such a pleasure to me to offer. I never thought properly of its paining you before, but I see now it must—and does," she added softly. "But you won't deprive me of my treat now? You do accept, don't you?"

"Yes, I accept your gift," he said firmly, but with a smile, that took away somewhat from the firmness. "I have no choice. If I could refuse for myself, I must accept for her sake, and the children's."

"Yes, and she must accept for your sake

and the children's, and the children have no voice in the matter at all. That is the charm of children! and so as you all of you must accept, I get my treat," and Florence clapped her hands, and laughed gaily. "No, now don't look grave, Harry, it is a treat, and a treat I have been wanting such a long time, for I do so want to see you and Fanny happy, and that is the only thing I care about now," and then she fell back on the sofa, and the old tired look came over her face again, and they could only kiss and caress her, and tell her she would make them very happy, but she must be happy too, herself, or else they could not be so either.

"You are killing yourself with this acting, I am afraid, Flo," said Fanny sadly.

"Oh no, it is not killing me, Fanny, do not fancy that please, and it is not acting makes me so tired to-day, but something quite different," and then she burst into tears.

"Then it is Percy Gordon," exclaimed

Fanny vindictively, speaking more like the old Fanny of St. James's Cray, than anyone had heard her speak for many a long day, "and I hate that Percy. He has spoiled all your life for you, and he never really loved you, and—"

"Hush, hush, Fanny. He loves me now, if he never loved me before, and I don't love him any longer, not in that way, and please never to speak to me of him again, for—for I don't like it, Fanny, and now tell me how did you find out about my acting? I meant to tell you anyhow to-day, but how did you find it out?"

"You are a very wicked deceitful child not to have told me before," said Fanny hanging over her, and kissing her all the time in a manner anything but in accordance with her words. "And I don't know how I shall ever believe in you again. Oh Flo, whatever other people are, I never thought you a humbug before; but it was Harry guessed, not I, I never should have. He

heard people talking about you, and he saw your photograph, and then he recollected about the maid saying Miss Lavington was with Mrs. Cholmondeley, and he put it all together, and understood the mystery, and that you were the wonderful Miss Lavington. For we both of us saw there was a mystery, and that you were concealing something from us from the very first."

"I hope you did not hear anything very bad about me—for I suppose of course bad things are said," and Florence looked rather anxiously at Major Bolton, as she asked this question.

"No, I did not hear anything very bad of my little sister. I heard you were very beautiful, and acted wonderfully, and that you had refused a certain Lord Mincington, and everyone wondered what Duke you were waiting for, that you should despise a young Earl, and nobody seemed to know."

"And I don't know either," said Florence laughing. "I am very sorry for Lord

Mincington, for I believe he cared a little, and he won't like being laughed at, at all, but it is his own fault, if people know all about it, and I hope he will get over it soon."

"Well, from what I hear people saying, he is going to make a tremendous match, just to show you what he is worth."

"I am afraid I shall never know it better than I do now," said Florence. "But now I must tell you something, that somehow I could not tell you before. Just when dear Magdalene was dying, uncle Henry came to see me, and he asked after you, and seemed quite anxious to know how you were getting on, and he said he was very sorry for what passed about your wedding, and he wanted me to go and live with him and cousin Mary."

"Dear Florence! and you could not because of this wretched acting?"

"Dear Fanny, you know if it was ever much pleasure to me to live with the Bulmers," laughed back Florence. Her spirits

seemed to have risen tremendously now. "But I said I would go and stay with them after three months, if they would have me, and now the three months are nearly over. In a very short time my engagement will be up. and I shall be free again, and now do you think that uncle Henry will receive me? Do you think cousin Mary will? She never was very fond of me, and of course they neither of them know anything of my acting yet."

"I am sure I don't know," said Fanny meditatively.

"Then you are free soon! I am so glad, Florence," said Major Bolton joyfully. Florence thought he looked a year younger on the instant.

"Yes, I am free the fourth of September, and by the way you must go to see me act. Yes you must, or you will always be fancying it worse than it is. Miss Lavington will give an order for to-night. Just now 'Noblesse Oblige' is on again, and I should

like you to see me in that," and springing up Florence proceeded to write a little note to the manager.

"Not to-night, Florence, you are so tired to-day," pleaded Fanny.

"But I must act just the same, whether I am tired or not, and it will revive me to think you are there, and you know you wanted to go last night."

"Yes, and I shall like very much to go some day, but—but—"

"But she will like going very much, Florence, and I am looking forward to a great treat, and now I think we had better go away, and leave you to rest for the present, so good bye dear little sister," and Major Bolton stooped and kissed Florence, "May God bless you, for all you have done for us," he added softly, and Florence heard his voice tremble, as he said this.

"It was much better to say we would like to go," he said to Fanny, while they were

slowly walking home together. "I hate the idea, but I don't want to cross her in anything, and I can understand her wishing it."

"I cannot," said Fanny.

It was a curious feeling to Fanny, the going to the theatre that night to see Florence act. She had not been to any place of the kind for the last three years, she had never been to any theatre with her husband, and so very often without him; the whole scene seemed so strangely familiar to her, as she seated herself in the New Theatre, finding it a hard struggle before she could force herself to take one of the vacant front seats in the box allotted to them, which still she felt bound to take, though wishing all the time to slink into the most private seat possible, or out of the theatre altogether. For now she had come to see Florence act, her own dear little sister, the only saint she had ever really believed in, and 'fascinating Fan' remembered too well the remarks on the actresses she had been wont to whisper

into the ears of men, her admirers, in the old days, and those other remarks they had been wont to whisper back in return.

In a sort of confused mist, she took in the whole scene, as she sat down, saw fashionable ladies with *bien gardées* daughters, and other ladies very little *gardées* either by others or themselves; saw the real thing in the shape of guardsmen, and the imitation article in the shape of government clerks; saw soldiers of all kinds and sizes, for in soldiers the New Theatre always specially abounded, and more especially now; saw many coloured geraniums, and crimson roses, and virgin lilies resting lightly on feathery chignons of most cunning workmanship; saw the fans, and the eye-glasses, and the opera-glasses; all these she saw for a moment in a mist, as she sat down, and then she looked away from everything, and everybody, and fixed her eyes on the drop-scene. The orchestra was just beginning to tune up, and each violin, as it twanged, sent an individual

thrill of pain through Fanny's agitated bosom. She drew the wedding veil, which she wore as a shawl, for Mrs. Bolton had but little variety of garments in those days, tighter round her, as she listened, and she grew pale, but she showed no further signs of flinching, and there was not a quiver in the blue veined eyelids, as the curtain drew up for the first piece. She even took up her glasses, and stared through them at the actresses, as she had never stared at anyone before, but then she dropped her glasses, and felt worse than at first, for in the excited anxiety, to which she was now a prey, she thought them wretched, bold faced, painted creatures, and she dreaded to think what Florence might look like before those wretched footlights. The first piece was one of those meaningless medleys of absurd vulgarity, such as are often to be seen now-a-days, and such as are not only seen but also applauded by what should be cultivated audiences, and what Fanny went through,

whilst it was being played, she never forgot again.

Neither she nor Major Bolton had spoken since they had entered the theatre; he sat opposite to her, his arms lightly folded upon the front of the box, and not by the movement of a muscle or any the slightest change of colour did he show what he was feeling, but his eyes likewise never moved from the stage, and he never raised his glasses. At last just when the curtain was going to rise upon "Noblesse Oblige," he looked round at his wife anxiously; he saw her sitting rather forward in her seat, her fine eyes dilated, and not a trace of colour in her cheeks, but still immoveable, determined to go through with it, *coûte que coûte;* then he looked away again, and concentrated himself once more upon the stage.

They both lived through the first scene, though how, they hardly knew, then the curtain drew up, and they saw Florence; Florence looking as pure, and simple, and

innocent as they had ever seen her in their lives, plucking her flower to pieces, just as artlessly to all seeming, as she could ever have plucked it to pieces in the old garden at St. James's Cray, and Fanny breathed again. None of the fast sayings she had been calling to mind could surely be said of such a holy creature, a simple innocent English girl. Her saint was in its niche once more, and she leant across the box, and whispered to Harry: "Does she not do it beautifully?" And it was no effort to her to say so.

"Beautifully!" he whispered in reply, and he looked up at her, and smiled, but Fanny thought she saw a glitter as of tears in his dark eyes. Then they both turned to the stage again.

When the curtain fell on the first act, Fanny had recovered sufficiently to be able to look about the house, and so doing she saw many once familiar faces, and among them Sir Henry Digby's. He was looking

at her, when she first saw him, and thus catching her eye, he immediately disappeared, and in a few minutes reappeared in the Boltons' box.

"How-de-do, how-de-do? I heard of your marriage long ago, but I have never seen you since to wish you joy, and it is rather late now. However, I see you are handsome as ever, so let us take the rest for granted. How are you, Major? You look rather seedy. Now how strange this meeting is, I had no idea you were in England, and I am only up in town for the night. Have you been here long?"

"No, we only arrived a few days ago from Mauritius, where we have been almost ever since we last saw you at Ryde. Harry is on sick leave now, but it will soon be up, and then we go to join the depôt."

"Oh, sick leave is it? I thought the Major looked rather seedy. But now, Mrs. Bolton, did you ever see a more extraordinary likeness?"

"To whom?" said Fanny. She was rather embarrassed, for she guessed what he meant, and did not quite know how Florence would like her telling her secret, but still she could not possibly keep it, not having been asked to do so.

"Why to your sister, my dear little friend Florence. It is the first time I have been here; what with dinner parties, and one thing and another a man has not a moment for his own private concerns in this horrid London, and it is the first time I have been able to get to see this Miss Lavington, of whom all the world has been talking, till I was almost sick of her name. I was pretty near vowing I never would go to see her, and I don't think I ever should have, but that I just had to run up to town to-day on business quite unexpectedly, and thus got an evening with nothing to do, and now I am perfectly flabbergasted. She is exactly the ditto of your sister."

"It is Florence herself," said Fanny,

quietly. Yet she could not keep from smiling to think how much Sir Henry Digby would make of this little bit of news, which he thus got possession of, somewhat before the rest of the world.

"No, good God, not really? You are not serious?" and his face of horror and concern showed her, she had wronged him at all events in the first instance; he did not treat it as a piece of news, not yet at least.

"Yes I am, but hush now. It is my first time too, and I must listen. Do you like to stay with us, you will lose nothing then?" and she pointed to a vacant seat. But though Sir Henry would not have missed anything for the world, above all now, he was too much excited to sit down at once, so he remained standing behind Fanny's chair, staring through his double glasses at "one of the nicest girls he had ever known," and whom, thinking so, he had done his little best to spoil.

"Good God!" he thought to himself,

"this cannot be my doing too, can it?" and whether it was a not yet quite untender conscience, or a conceit natural to the man, he could not at once answer "no." Indeed he had had his little part in it; it was partly owing to him, partly to him, and partly to others, that Florence, when she first wanted money, had no friend she could ask to answer for her. Had she been able to go out as a governess she would probably never afterwards have become an actress, and the reason she could not be a governess was, because she had no one, she had known of late, she could ask for a recommendation, and this was because, partly owing to Sir Henry Digby, partly to others, the people she ought to have been mixing with of late had cut her. It was but fair that Sir Henry should feel some twinges of remorse, as he stared through his double glasses, at what he had thought, when he first came across her, "one of the nicest girls he had ever known," and who was now the first actress

of the day, and nicer than ever, Sir Henry thought.

Glancing round the theatre, Fanny had been amused to recognise Captain Curzon gazing with all his eyes at Florence. "So he is constant, though he does not know it, any more than I did," she thought, and smiled to herself, and, next to him, she noticed another man equally intent upon the stage, a big man, though he hardly looked so beside Captain Curzon, a plain man too, but with such an expressive, speaking face that one almost overlooked its plainness, and so evidently a gentleman, that it would never occur to anyone on looking at him, to consider whether he was so. He was gazing very earnestly at Florence also. "Oh! I am sure he is in love with her too," thought Fanny; "now, if I only look about, I shall be able to pick out all Florence's lovers. How amusing!" but, looking about a little more, her eye fell on a long, lanky form, which, surely, she recognised. Yes,

for now he turned round, and she saw the kindly blue eyes, and foolish, blonde face of poor Paddy, her own old lover. He evidently recognised her after a minute or two; at first, as it seemed to her, he was only looking at her, because she had been pointed out to him by the girl beside him, a pretty little girl enough, but "with no air," as Fanny thought. "His bride, I suppose," she said to herself, and sighed, for it being the last naughty act of her naughty, unmarried days, she had felt many pangs of remorse for the pain she had once inflicted upon this poor Paddy. "Well, she will make him a very nice little wife, I daresay, but I should have thought he would have chosen more of a lady." Then her reflections were interrupted, for it being the end of the act, Mr. O'Neile took the opportunity of slipping out, and coming to her box to talk to her for a little.

"How do you do, Mrs. Bolton; how are you? I had no idea you were in England."

"We have only just arrived. You know Major Bolton, surely? No! I thought you did."

"I had not that honour," said Paddy, bowing very stiffly as he spoke, and then quickly turning his back upon the Major. He had hated that man once, as much as it had been in his nature to hate anyone, and he could not quite forget it even now. He thought Mrs. Bolton not quite so beautiful as he remembered her; but what a grand, glorious creature she was still, though he would not have noticed her, had not his little wife pointed her out to him, struck with admiration of her magnificent neck and shoulders, for Fanny had dropped her shawl by this time, and was displaying all their charms, though not, happily, quite in the Garden of Eden style indulged in by some of those around her. Though he did not wish for her any longer himself, for had he not his own little bride, whom he loved dearly, yet Paddy could not think Major

Bolton a whit more worthy to possess this grand beauty than he had thought him in the old days at Ryde, and, so thinking, he could not treat them with much civility, for Paddy was very genuine, and his good manners, when he had them, came from his heart, and were not the outward polish acquired by mixing in society, and his bad manners came from his heart also.

"You must introduce me to Mrs. O'Neile, won't you?" said Fanny, still in the same gracious tones, not at all disconcerted by her old lover's want of courtesy to her husband. "I am not wrong in guessing it is your wife whom you were sitting next, am I, though I did not know of her existence before?"

"No, we have only been married a week," said Paddy apologetically. "I should be delighted to introduce her, and I am sure she would be charmed to make your acquaintance. She is the greatest little darling," he added enthusiastically, for he

loved her very dearly, and yet he knew she could not hold a candle for beauty to this old love, whom he was now talking to.

"She looks it. Bring her to see me to-morrow, won't you? for, perhaps, you won't be much longer in town."

"No, only a very few days, then we are going down to Kent, for Nellie to say good-bye to all her people, and, after that, we set sail for India. I wanted her to see some of the London sights first, for she knows nothing of town, and this is the best sight we have seen yet. Is not Miss Lavington a regular jewel?"

"She is my sister, you know, so I ought not to praise her, I suppose," and this time Fanny looked grander than ever, for she disliked making the confession, and yet she was too proud not to make it, since it was sure to be generally known soon now.

Mr. O'Neile looked very much taken aback, and in that state he never had anything to say, and the blonde moustache did not

seem to give him the same comfort, that his black moustache gave Major Bolton, so he stood quite still, and looked straight in front of him, his head a little up, as if he were still trying to keep in line with that imaginary company ahead, just as he had been used to do on Ryde Pier, and Fanny finding the pause awkward, went on, "Did you not see a likeness?"

"Oh, yes, I saw a likeness, but, of course, I did not think it possible—I mean, I did not think it likely—it is a long time ago, and I never saw much of your sister," said Paddy confusedly; he never had been a good hand at talking, and his flirtations had not progressed by that means, as the reader will remember. He was so confused now that he thought it best to take refuge in flight; so, promising to take his little wife to call next day, he now went back to her, feeling very glad that he had won such a nice little fireside ornament in the marriage lottery, instead of this old love, who over-

whelmed him with her grand beauty and her actress sister, and her roué husband, for such Paddy had always chosen to consider Major Bolton. And he sat down with renewed contentment by his simple little country wife, who never frightened him at all; and, as he sat beside her, he took her hand in his, and pressed it lovingly, and Fanny noticed this little action, and it reminded her of old days, and she smiled to see it. "It is just as well he has married the girl he has," she said to herself; "for no lady would stand much of that sort of thing." She forgot perhaps, how often she had stood it herself, without quite such a good excuse as that of being his wife.

Then she looked about the house again, and she saw young Clifford lounge in with the air befitting a used-up man of the world. A very imitation article indeed he was, and not of the Whitehall branch, of which he had been wont to talk so proudly; a much inferior office boasted of him as its own.

She saw him fix his eye-glass in his eye, and just glance a careless glance at Florence; and, if she had been nearer, she might have heard him say: "Ya'as, ya'as, all very well, not gone off *much* yet. I come to look at her sometimes, because I used to know her, before she became so awful fast. Very well connected, but my mother and sisters had to cut her of course, at once, and then she went a wegular mucker, and quawelled with her welations, and now she is an actwess, you see. Ya'as, not quite so pwetty as she was—too bold, now, though she does the innocent vewy nicely—always was her line."

Then young Clifford glided away to convince some friends in a neighbouring box of the fact of his existence by a fishy shake of the hand, and a few similar remarks. He made a great deal of his former acquaintance with Miss Lavington, and of his knowledge of her real name, just at present, but he had not much of an *entrée* into the London

world, so his intelligence took some time to permeate into the upper circles.

"I wonder how you stand that fellow even in your shop," said a dignified Treasury clerk to a bright looking little fellow on the smallest of small scales, the same whom young Clifford had addressed on entering.

"We did intend chucking him out o' window once," repled Charlie Cust, alias Cheeky, "but you see we live in such a devilish fashionable part. If all the *élite* were to stare up at once, as they would be cocksure to do, they are so precious glad to get anything to stare about, it would not be quite the cheese if we did not blush, and the crammers, to whom, blessings on their venerable heads! we owe all we know, not having included that in their course of instruction, we are not much good at the sort of thing."

"I believe you, Cheeky my boy," said Treasury clerk Number Two, "it will be a big time before you next blush, if you ever managed such a feat."

"It did not make much impression, if I ever perpetrated such a rusticity," said Cheeky, in the tone of an extra heavy swell, then falling into his own manner again. "But next time it shall be a regular exhibition, five shillings admittance. You will take a ticket, won't you, old fellow?"

"Half-a-dozen at the least. I have no fear of being called on to fork out yet awhile," said Treasury clerk, Number Two, while Number One with more dignity replied:

"You will only get into hot water, Cheeky, the public is tired of hoaxes, and that is all your blushing will ever come to. You won't try it, if you take my advice.

"Thankie, old boy, I think I will, *rather*. And now good gracious if it is not time for me to be off. I am due this hour at my aunt Lady Goldinperl's, and as she is my godmamma, and got no little incumbrances—tata, my charmer," and airily kissing his hand to Miss Lavington, the little fellow

affectedly covering his face with his handkerchief disappeared in the crowd.

"What a little villain he is to go talking of crammers! good care he took they should cram nothing into him, or with all his grand relations he might easily have got into the Treasury."

"Why not say the Guards at once? He might have just as easily, and he is just the little fellow to die in the front with the colours folded round him, and all the papers talking of him as a hero, and the young ladies writing poetry about him. Can't you fancy Cheeky refusing to die, till he had got the colours draped becoming? He is a regular little game cock, but as to that fellow Clifford—ah, this is my favourite bit, is not she perfect now?"

Fanny heard nothing of this conversation, but she guessed enough of what he was saying from young Clifford's expression, and all her old aversion to him returned with fresh force. He had better take care how

he comes across Mrs. Bolton for the next few years, for though she is not the Season Ticket any longer, she has still got a tongue of her own, and can use it upon occasions.

After the play was over Fanny insisted on going to speak to Florence, so to the admiring envy of all beholders the Boltons forced their way into the private dressing-room, and found Florence already cloaked and just ready to go home. Fanny threw herself into her arms. "My dearest, it has been too perfect. I never saw acting like it, I cannot even mind the idea of it for you any longer—not as I did."

Florence smiled. "Are you not glad you came now? I know you did not wish to, but are you not glad now?"

"Yes, so glad."

"And you, Harry?" Florence looked up anxiously at him, and Major Bolton could not resist stroking the soft, brown hair, as he replied:

"I think your acting so very perfect, that

like the selfish brute I am, I should like best to enjoy it in private—but your engagement is up soon now."

"Oh yes, very soon now. But if you expect to see me act in private, you will be disappointed, for I never could do that."

Major Bolton smiled, and he stroked the soft hair again. "There is only one kind of acting I care for from you, Florence, and that I hope to see for many a year to come. Now we must not keep you longer, for you are tired of course."

"Yes, rather," and Florence pressed his hand gratefully, as she said good night to him. Now at last she was growing quite fond of Harry for his own sake, not only because he was the man Fanny had always loved best. Then she kissed Fanny, and as she drove home by herself, she smiled. "Ah," she said to herself, "I have succeeded. They think it has been all like this, and they neither of them mind it half so much now, but oh how tired I am!

so very tired," she murmured to herself, and rested her throbbing head upon her hands. "Shall I ever live through these next few nights? Oh Percy! Percy! I feel as if you had been given in charge to me, and now I had driven you mad, and I cannot hear anything about you, and if I write to you, or even ask too much, you will think I am changing my mind, and I can't change, I can't."

CHAPTER XVI.

"WITH THEE WERE THE DREAMS OF MY EARLIEST LOVE."

FLORENCE'S incognito was now quite at an end. Sir Henry Digby called on her next day, and was most pressing in his invitation to her to go down to Oakover directly she was free. "Lady Digby will write you an invitation herself as soon as I get home, and I am going down this afternoon. I am only stopping in town now to see you, or I should have gone off by the early train."

Florence thanked him very much, but refused. "I am engaged to stay at the Bulmers' then, if they will have me," she said, "but I don't know if they will, when they hear about my acting."

"Come to Oakover then," cried Sir Henry, "you will find a warm welcome there, if you find nothing else, none of that cold shake of the hand, and I'll show you your room, I daresay you will like to dress for dinner at once. I hate that kind of thing myself. I like people to come forward cordially, and shake hands with both hands, as if they were really glad to see you. That is what I like, don't you?"

"Yes," said Florence, smiling faintly. It seemed so strange to her to hear Sir Henry's hearty slap-dash kind of talk, just the same still as it had been during that time at Ryde, which now seemed so very long ago to her. She recollected how it had been that hearty manner that had charmed her then quite as much, if not more than the cultivated opinions he would give expression to, when so minded. It seemed wonderful to her to find him still just the same, when she herself felt as if she were so much changed. "That is very nice, I daresay," she said, "and

it is very kind of you to promise me a warm welcome, but I don't know Lady Digby, and —and I have promised to stay with my uncle and aunt, if they will have me."

"Well, well, after that we must have you down to Oakover, you can't stay with them for ever you know, but I cannot stay any longer now myself, so we must have you down to Oakover some day, remember, and don't let us lose sight of you again for so long. Dear, dear, it seems only like yesterday, and to find all so changed. Well, goodbye, goodbye, my dear creature. Only remember you must come to Oakover some day. Lady Digby will be charmed to see you," and so saying with a hearty grasp of the hand, into which had to be compressed a great deal of feeling, that there was no time to express in words, for he was hurrying now to catch his train, just as at Ryde he had been hurrying to catch his steamer, Sir Henry went on his way, and Florence feeling she no longer ought to delay about

it, seeing the news might any day now reach him in some other and more startling way, sat down and wrote to Lord Bulmer.

Meanwhile Paddy had taken his little bride to see Mrs. Bolton, and Fanny had come to the conclusion, that she was a dear little creature, and that her "having no air," was after all not such a great disadvantage, and the little bride had rather clung to Fanny, whom her husband had described to her as a great friend in old times, and had no idea, little innocent that she was, that her lanky, blond, beau ideal had once nearly gone mad for love of this grand, beautiful woman, who was now living in such shabby lodgings, and notwithstanding looked so anything but shabby herself. It never occurred to the simple little creature, who had given her heart all away at once to big, simple Paddy, that this introduction of herself was but the fulfilment of an old promise wrung from him, when his heart was aching more violently for this other woman, than she

could ever have made it ache for herself, very dearly though he loved her now, having gained her. Had she known all, she would have suffered many a pang, and felt a great jealousy of this beautiful woman, whom it would be absurd for her, pretty, insignificant, little girl that she was, to call her rival; and all these pangs, and all this jealousy, would have been unnecessary, for big, foolish Paddy was not quite so big a fool, as ever to waste any more regrets on fascinating Fan now, and they never met again.

It looks very tragic, written down, as I have just written it; but there was nothing very tragic in the reality, nor did any of the people concerned think it tragic at all. Only the O'Neiles went to India, whilst the Boltons remained in England, and, when the O'Neiles came home again, each of the two married couples had settled into its own groove, and its own set, and these were different, and thus it came about they never

met again. So, now, poor Paddy finally and for ever disappears from these pages with his little wife, "pretty, but with no air," who has only just made her *debût* in them, and who, nevertheless, must make her curtsey now, and retire with her husband, big, foolish, good-hearted maypole as he is, and would always remain, were we to prosecute our acquaintance with him, even to the end of his chapter.

After the O'Neiles' departure, Fanny went to see Florence, and was shocked to find her looking so ill. "Dearest Florence, can you not make some excuse? It is impossible you should act again to-night; you will kill yourself, if you go on in this way."

"Oh, no," said Florence, faintly. "I can go on to the end."

"My dear Flo, that is so like you; but now tell me how you can get off to-night, what ought to be done?"

"Nothing can be done that I know of.

Please don't worry yourself, Fanny. I must act, and I can."

Fanny sighed, just as she had sighed long ago, when Florence had been as fixed in her constancy to Percy Gordon, as she now was in her determination to act. She saw well enough that the effort of changing her mind, if even a possible effort for her now, would exhaust Florence yet more than acting, so she gave it up at once, and soon went home, leaving her to rest, but Florence could not rest. She wrote to Lord Bulmer, in the first place; then she recollected she had almost accepted an invitation to one of the Twickenham croquet-parties for that day, and she thought she would go there. Sitting under the shade of the trees would be far more reviving than lying in that little room only provided after the London fashion with means of defence to repulse the violent siege the summer sun was so pertinaciously carrying on against it. So she dressed herself to go, and then it occurred to her it might

amuse Fanny to go also, so she drove first to the Boltons' lodgings, and there she found Captain Curzon, who had only just realised that Mrs. Bolton's lovely bridesmaid, to whose memory he had been true so long, and the beautiful actress, whom he was now wild for love of, were one and the same, and was taking his time about understanding it, as big men mostly do take their time about understanding any very startling piece of intelligence. Fanny was, meanwhile, describing to Major Bolton, who looked very grave about it, the exhausted state in which she had found Florence that morning, when in came Florence herself, a cloud of white muslin, with a lovely pink flush upon her cheeks, and quietly announced her Twickenham intentions.

Fanny tried hard to dissuade her, but Major Bolton seemed to be rather of Florence's opinion that the shady trees would do her more good than anything. He looked rather done up himself, poor man, and as if

the shady trees would be good for him also, but he had a business appointment later in the day, so there could be nothing of the kind for him, and Florence, who saw he would like to go too, pitied him, and could not enough admire his patience, as he tried to amuse Tottles into quietness, after Fanny had gone upstairs to dress; for Tottles, like most children in London, on a hot, oppressive day, was inclined to be restless and cross. But, whilst Florence admired his patient kindness, she could not help feeling a bitter pain at her heart, to think what the man she remembered must have gone through before acquiring it; and she noticed, with a startled sorrow, all the signs of illness, that had escaped her before, but that came out with fresh force now, when he was pulled down by increased heat. Certainly, London in summer was not the place to brace him up again, but she knew the Boltons did not mean to go out of town now, till she could leave it, too. Oh, it seemed to her, in her

weary, excited state then, that that time would never come.

Meanwhile, as she waited for Fanny, Major Bolton seemed too tired to talk; and so Captain Curzon had his innings, and very shyly and stammeringly entered into conversation with the lady of his dreams. Poor, big fellow! it seems quite absurd to talk about anything so airy as dreams in connexion with him; but, yet, he had them, just as light, too, and unsubstantial as other people's dreams are. And Florence told him quite simply, why she had been so unwilling to talk to him, when she had met him a few nights before, how she had thought he would recognise her, and how he, of all people, was the last she wished to do so just then, as he would be so likely to tell the Boltons of her acting, and she wished to tell them herself. And as he listened, Captain Curzon felt happier than happy, while falling into one horsy attitude after another, on the uncomfortable chair, which he had as usual

selected, and which this day fell to his lot quite naturally, in the Boltons' lodgings. And Florence was taken, just as Bertram Beresford had thought she would be, by the big fellow's kindly tact, which saved him from saying anything that could possibly hurt her feelings; a feat this, which not just anyone could have accomplished, in the then state of things. But Captain Curzon had a hand that never chafed the tenderest mouthed horse, and he treated a woman as he treated a horse, and the woman he loved best as his favourite horse, and the same quality stood him in good stead in both cases. And Florence was touched by the simple singleness of purpose that shone so clearly through every word he said. Yes, Bertie was not far wrong; Captain Curzon was just the man for a woman sated and disgusted with the made-up adulation of the world, and the selfish, so-called love of worldlings to fall back upon, and rest on, and be very happy with; for he had a nature that could al-

ways respond to noble thoughts, even if it could not originate many of them. But the stars had been unpropitious to Captain Curzon, and they had brought him across Florence Berkeley's path, when her heart was very sore and smarting, and very far still from thinking of rest anywhere. Yet she liked the big fellow, even went so far as to think to herself that she liked him better than any man she had known for a long time, a very long time.

Fanny made herself very agreeable at Twickenham, and everyone was very much struck by her, and very much interested in hearing how this grand, still fashionable looking beauty—for Fanny could not look otherwise than fashionable, however she was dressed, and this day she had only thought it due to her sister to put on the best things she possessed—was sister to Miss Lucia Lavington, and how Miss Lucia Lavington was not Miss Lavington at all, nor Lucia either, but, in reality, Miss Florence Berke-

ley. "A regular, old, county family, and related to half the peerage," people were soon saying to each other; for news of this kind did not of course lose by repetition, and everyone was repeating it to everyone. And, while they all talked about it, and wondered, Florence sat in the shade, and looked supremely lovely; for the pink flush did not go down, indeed it seemed to grow stronger, and deeper; though the shade was cool, and there was besides a little, but very refreshing breeze. And Captain Beresford, who had once upon a time taken upon himself to study croquet as a science, and done it, as he did everything that he undertook, *con amore*, vowed he could not play a stroke that day, and hovered about Florence's chair, and finally by a long dissertation upon casual wards, his pet topic for the time being, succeeded in interesting her to the exclusion of her other admirers, and thus put them to flight, and then, just as he was thinking he had got her to himself, and so gained her

undivided attention, and was about to state what he thought the best plan now to be pursued under existing circumstances, all Florence's colour and animation disappeared at once, and together, and, without any apology, she looked up with those deep, blue eyes, into whose depths so very few people were ever suffered now to look, and said:—

"Tell me, Captain Beresford, have you seen anything of Mr. Gordon lately? I know he was a friend of yours."

"What, Percy Gordon! Yes, he *was*," replied Bertram; and there was a greater grief at his heart than any that could have been caused by his being pulled up sharp in this way, in the midst of his favourite subject.

"Oh, what has happened to him? He is not dead, is he?" and Florence's hands were clasped tight, and an ashen look came over her face, that made Bertram Beresford feel sick and shivery.

"No, no. Forgive me, Miss La—Miss Berkeley, I mean," cried he confusedly. "I

did not mean to frighten you; indeed, I am very sorry. I only said 'was' because you did, and indeed I have not seen him lately. He has gone to Hombourg, and if, as I believe, he is a friend of yours, you will be sorry to hear he had been losing very heavily before he went."

"He is a cousin of mine. I am very sorry."

"A cousin of yours! Gordon did not know that, himself, did he?"

"No, he did not recognise me; it was so many years since we had met, but we had been great friends once upon a time, and I never thought he did not know me." The pink flush came back stronger than ever now. She did not wish to say more than was necessary; but she had a respect for Captain Beresford, and wished to right herself in his eyes, had he, as she now fancied possible, thought that she had treated Percy Gordon with too much favour.

"I understand," said Bertram slowly.

Now this was what Captain Curzon would never have said, and it angered Florence, for the last thing she wished him to do, was to understand what had been maddening her these last few days, so she went on quickly with what she had originally wished to say; for she had known quite well Percy was at Hombourg, and did not at all care about hearing that again.

"I am very sorry he should have been losing here, because, most probably, that will only make him play the higher at Hombourg. As you are his friend, do not you think you could do something to get him away from Hombourg now? Could not you be his friend now, when he wants a friend so much, as I am sure he does?"

"You mean, could I not go to Hombourg to look after him? But it would be no use. A man of Gordon's age, if he wants a friend in that way is—is no good. Forgive my saying so," and Bertie's lips closed hard and firm like a vice; and he looked very straight

before him, and as if he were as utterly without feeling, as he was then full of it.

Then Florence's eyes swam in tears, and she looked no more at Bertram Beresford, but thought bitterly to herself, that she ought to have asked this service of one of her lovers, not of this man, who had only been always friendly to her, and yet she knew not one of her lovers could do what she wanted for her, and that Bertram Beresford, of all the men she knew, was the only man, who was capable of it.

"It is only when he is in need, that a man's friends are really valuable to him," she said, after a few moments, in a low broken voice, for she liked no better than another being refused a favour, she had brought herself to ask, "and it may be circumstances, and not at all the nature of the man himself, that put him in the position to need a friend."

Bertram Beresford had recovered himself by this time. He had his own opinion of Percy Gordon, for all his being his friend,

and he could not have done this service for her, that Florence had but now asked of him; but he had collected his thoughts by this time, and remembered that there were circumstances, that prevented his doing so, as well as his own nature, and Percy Gordon's nature, so he spoke calmly and not hardly now. "I should not have thought that there was anything you could have asked of me, which I would not have done for you—and with pleasure. But as it happens unfortunately it would be out of the question for me to go to Hombourg just now. Only the other day I chose to defer my leave, because, as my sister's wedding is to be in town, I preferred stopping here for the present, and so I could not go away for any time, besides just now I should not think it fair to her to go away at all. Linda is more like my child than my sister, I have so often had to act as her chaperon and protector, owing to my mother's want of health, and now she

is to leave us for altogether so soon, she would feel it bitterly, if I went away even for a few days, which is all I could do, and which also would be quite useless as concerns Gordon. But I will tell you what I will do for him, I will write to him, and besides a little good advice, which probably he will not read, I will tell him how the wild duck at a little place an uncle left me last year, want looking after, and ask him to go and make short work with them, as I am tied by the leg at present, and have been indeed ever since I got it. I hear though that they have been multiplying at a great rate, and as Gordon goes in for being a keen sportsman, that may perhaps lure him home. If I may tell him at the same time that you have been enquiring after him, that would probably do more good than anything."

"But you must not tell him that," said Florence softly.

Bertram had been looking straight before

him, as he plodded conscientiously through his very long speech, but now he turned round, and looked at her almost sternly.

"Do you mean that now—as a man speaking to a man? I tell you what, Miss Berkeley, your cousin, since he is so, was putting on the steam rather furiously before he left England, and anything you ever mean to do to save him, ought to be done now at once."

Florence kept her hands still clasped, and the colour went away again, and her eyes remained full of tears, but she looked up bravely at Bertram Beresford now. "As a man to a man I mean it. It would only make it worse afterwards," she said and sighed. "I know Percy too well to think he would ever rest satisfied with that."

"Certainly he would not rest satisfied with that, but—well I will do what I can, I promise you, and we must hope for the best. There is a great deal of good in him, if only—"

"If only he cared about it," said Florence wearily. "I know what you mean. He is my cousin, and I used to know him very well. Thank you very much, Captain Beresford."

"Oh not at all. I am his friend you know, and I would do a great deal to serve him really any day."

He would now, but he had not been quite so ready before she had said, speaking "as a man to a man," that he was not to tell Percy Gordon she had been enquiring after him. And now Florence all on a sudden became aware that she had been acknowledging to faults in Percy Gordon, a thing which she had never done before in all the course of her life except to Fanny, and here had she been doing so now to a man who had been a stranger to her but a month or two before, so she changed the subject abruptly again.

"I did not know one of your sisters was going to be married, is it to be soon?"

"Yes, very soon I am sorry to say; though it is a really good fellow she is going to marry, for all his being the most affected man about town. Philip Beauregard takes more airs upon himself than any other man of my acquaintance without exception, so I always think it shows what real good there is in him, that I don't object to my favourite little sister marrying him, and Linda and I have been more together than generally is the case." He continued talking now about his own affairs, more than he was wont to do, because it was easy for him, or indeed for any man to see, that the best thing to be done now, at least the thing most likely to please his hearer, was that he should go on talking—about anything, so long as she was not required to talk herself. "Linda was brought early out of the school-room, when my other sister married, which she foolishly did at seventeen, before any of her own family had properly made her acquaintance, and thus a gap was made

in the family, which Linda was not long about filling up, and she soon took a much more prominent place in the family, than any Tina would ever have cared for.

"Is she pretty?" asked Florence languidly.

"Always a woman's first question," cried Bertram indignantly, and at once fully conscious of his own plainness. "No, she is not, and my other sister, Mrs. Jenkinson, is considered one of the prettiest women about town, yet I like Linda's face best. But then she has been my particular sister for some time now; it was only fair that she should be a favourite with me indeed, seeing that she came out of the school-room with a great devotion, conceived, Heaven only knows how, for my poor self, which she has lost no opportunity of displaying ever since. So naturally I had to make some return for it, and I have doctored her with good advice, and seen her through all her scrapes, till the ungrateful little goose has tired of the easy life she led, and thinks Beauregard

would not be so careful, and that consequently life would be more amusing under his auspices."

"It must be very nice to have a brother," said Florence smiling.

Then Bertram's heart gave a great leap. If he could even be only as a brother to this girl, whom he loved, as he had never thought to love any woman! But one glance at the pale composed face, the face that looked as if it had gone through so much, and yet had lost nothing of its tender softness (it was only at times that Florence looked hard even now), so different to the April-faced Linda, who had known no sorrows but of her own making, plenty of those though, convinced him of the impracticability of that idea, and, being a practical man, he straightway forgot his thought.

That night Bertram wrote to Percy Gordon, and after he had despatched his letter, he sat up late and meditated over it, and next morning he had to be away at an

early parade, so it was late in the day when he first saw Linda already equipped for the ride, in which he was as usual to chaperon her, though Beauregard was to accompany her also. That task of chaperoning is sometimes a very irksome one, and some people think a fourth makes it pleasanter to all parties, but these three, with whom we have to do, never thought so. Bertram liked Beauregard well enough, and loved his little sister dearly, and he liked to see the two so happy in their love, that like children they sported with their happiness, Beauregard doing the heavy swell, and affecting to think he was on duty with his fiancée, and that a day off would be a treat, and Linda mercilessly cutting to pieces her lover's affectations, and professing her horror of them. And neither of them seemed to think Bertram in the way, for they both cared for him, as much as they could care for anyone, excepting of course each other, and that was a great deal in Linda's case, and pretty well

for a man in Beauregard's, for men are not quite so much given to caring for people as women. And they always professed themselves delighted that Bertram should suggest some more sensible subjects for conversation, than would ever have occurred unassisted to their own giddy pates.

"Now what wise matter is your big head full of to-day, Bertie?" said Beauregard, who by degrees was becoming familiar with the pet name for her brother, that had hitherto been Linda's exclusive property, "But first tell us what this *éclaircissement* is about the nine days' wonder. No end of a swell does not she turn out to be?"

"About Miss Florence Berkeley you mean. It is hardly an *éclaircissement*, I should think no one ever did really believe that her name was Lucia Lavington. I know I never did; that only sounds made up for the occasion. Well, the Berkeleys are a very good family, I believe, not rich now as they once were, like a good many other good

families, and her mother was sister to Lord Bulmer. That is pretty near all I know about them, and that her sister is the girl who was engaged to Freddy Anson years ago."

"Fweddy Anson! distinguished Fwed! but which girl? Not that Miss Berkeley surely, he went to the seaside with, and who grew skittish, as Fweddy grew seasick?"

"Yes, I suppose so, though I never heard that version exactly. She is married to a Major Bolton, in the same regiment as Curzon now, and is almost handsomer than ever. I saw her yesterday, and she is very much improved in style, she used to be dreadfully fast."

"Yes, wather wapid," drawled out Beauregard, "awful swell girl, too. Anson almost the only commoner she would dance with."

"Then she is a lady after all," exclaimed Linda; "that almost spoils the romance of the thing, but it will make it easier with papa, and after all I don't believe you could

quite have made up your mind to marry not a lady."

"Certainly I should never think of such a thing," said Bertram loftily. "But from the first moment I ever saw her, I would have given just as much as I would now to marry Miss Lavington," he added, with some heat, for his passion was growing stronger now, and with such provocation it was impossible for him even to pretend to conceal it any longer. "I have wished it from the first with my whole heart, and I see no more or less difficulty about it now, than I did then, for I have always thought it an impossibility. Come, we may as well have a gallop," and Bertie put spurs into his horse, and the three started off at a slightly illegal pace, the two lovers more silent than usual out of compassion for the third, who loved as truly as they did, but, alas! less happily.

CHAPTER XVII.

"DEEP AS FIRST LOVE AND WILD WITH ALL REGRET."

Percy Gordon did not accept Bertram Beresford's invitation to slaughter his wild duck for him; that note of Bertram's was so much waste paper as far as the receiver of it was concerned. Percy had put on the steam in England, and he was now putting on the steam at Hombourg, only his luck had changed, and he gained now just as he had lost before, but to look at him no one would ever have thought that he was a man in luck. He was burning the candle at both ends now, and Percy had never had much strength to speak of, since that terrible time in Australia, when he had broken down once

and again. Well, it would be over all the sooner, he thought, and the sooner it should be over, the better would he be pleased.

Never before had he so fully felt how completely he had wasted his life, it had all been a mistake from beginning to end, he thought now. His idea of a happy man was the man who married young the girl, that loved him, and that he loved, and who, on three hundred a year, or whatever else the competent judges pronounce to be the minimum on which a *ménage* can be *montée* at all, sets to work to climb up step by step the arduous but ever glorious ladder of fame, and reaches—not the summit of course, but a good way up some day, and then rests; rests with the wife who has loved and cherished him through all his working years, and now loves and cherishes him still, and with the children those years have given him in their course. That was Percy Gordon's ideal happy man, and now here was he. He had not married the girl that loved

him, and whom he loved, far from it—he had gone away and forgotten her. He had not set to work on a modest competence; he had had a fortune, a small one certainly, but still a fortune, and he had run through it, before it could properly be called his own. He had climbed no rounds in the ladder of fame, none absolutely. No, he had married an heiress, who had loved him, and he had not loved her, and thus killed her. Oh, he knew that well enough now, and often said to himself that he had killed her, his stupid loving little wife, the once beautiful Australian heiress. He had gone near to run through her fortune also, still without anything to show for it, only now his luck had changed, and now too he thought his time would soon be up, and there was nothing to show for it, nothing. None but his friends would speak of him, when he was dead, if even they did, and Percy was selfish still as always, he did not care much about his friends, though he would have revelled in a

reputation. Vague ideas of shooting himself, if only as a means to that end, passed through his mind sometimes, but suicides are too common-place, and even were they not, Percy lacked the nerve. He lacked the nerve even to press on, and break the Bank, when his luck was at the full; he did not want to break the Bank, he did not want the money, he had not got the nerve to risk all on one grand *coup*.

He thought of his love sometimes in a vague kind of way; he did not know himself whether he thought of her as Florence, or as Lucia, both names were often on his lips during those disturbed, restless tossings, which had taken the place of sleep, the comforter, for Percy Gordon now. He did not know how time passed, he did not see when summer turned to autumn, when the wind grew cold, and the rain fell. He was in a fever, and he still went wandering about as before, playing when the fit seized him, and for the most part losing now;

luck cannot last for ever. He had taken to drinking also, and that unsteadied him, and made his nerves worse than ever. I do not mean that anyone ever saw Percy Gordon drunk in these days, not as a tired-out drayman is drunk after a hard day's work, or even as a used-up nobleman from very idleness, both still too frequently, but that he took a *petit verre* now to quench his thirst, where formerly he would have drunk wine, and rosy Celeste Empire, and sparkling Eau d'Argent were no longer without their charms for him. These fiery beverages did their best to burn up the little strength that was yet left in him; he coughed more frequently now, and there was a fixed red in his cheek, which only changed to become fiercer, when he coughed; and he was fallen away, and but a shadow of his former self, when one day late on in the autumn, as he was wandering purposelessly about, at Ischl now, for he tried a variety of foreign watering places, always finding them all terribly the same,

he came up with two ladies in a carriage, and, looking into the face of one of them, saw two large dark eyes staring recognition of him, and himself recognised Mrs. Northwey.

"You here!" he exclaimed, with a dark, reckless smile, a woeful change from that old smile of deadly sweetness, before which so many fair victims had succumbed in London. "I went to see you before I left town, and found you flown, and your house to let. Curious we should meet here at last!"

"Why curious?" asked Mrs. Northwey, and her large *simpatica* eyes looked in a sort of terror at this strange wild being, who was, and yet was not Percy Gordon, but he made no answer.

He stood beside the carriage still, but he was looking away into the mountain, as if he saw something in the distance there; his clothes were old, and torn somewhat, he had been walking wildly through the

bushes, his boots were clotted with mud, and about his general appearance there was a look of desperation, which irresistibly drew forth the next question from Mrs. Northwey, this time very low and softly spoken.

"Are you ruined, Mr. Gordon?"

"Ruined!" he laughed fiercely. "Ruined! I hardly know. Pounds, shillings, and pence always were beyond my arithmetic. They say capital melts away sooner than a man's income, but I don't know; I have got enough to pay for my dinner, and my night's lodging, when I want it."

He looked up at the distant mountains, as he spoke, as if there was the lodging he would prefer on the top of those snowy peaks. Mrs. Northwey shuddered.

"Get into our carriage, Mr. Gordon. It is so long since we have met, and so much has happened since then."

"Yes, yes, a lot of things," he said, "but there is no use in talking about them now.

Is your husband dead yet?" he asked abruptly, almost brutally.

"No, no, I should not ask you if he were," almost shrieked back the poor frightened little woman. "But I could not nurse him any longer, they would not let me, and I was very ill, so I have come abroad with Lucy. You don't know my sister? Lucy, Mr. Gordon."

Percy Gordon took off his hat, and looked at Mrs. Northwey's sister, a plain sensible seeming woman, with ordinary brown eyes, and a scanty allowance of hair, and a large mouth, and a small nose, and with no particular complexion, but yet with an expression that in many people's eyes would more than have made up for all these deficiencies, a calm kind sensible expression. Percy grew quieter at once.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I heard a sad account of him. I should like to have a talk with you, for as you say many things have happened since we met,

but I have been walking now, and am too dirty to get into your carriage. I will go and see you this evening after dinner, I know you do not object to a cigar then—if you will tell me where you are stopping."

Later in the evening Percy sauntered up to the Hotel, where Mrs. Northwey and her sister were staying; he was dressed like a gentleman again now, though not in evening dress, swallow-tailed coats are happily not yet *de rigueur* at Ischl, and he behaved like a gentleman also, being now dressed like one, and was fierce and brutal no more, and once or twice the old sorrowful sweet smile came back to him, hardly resting upon his face, but just flitting across it, like a memento of the past, and each time he smiled that smile, Mrs. Northwey's heart gave a little jump.

There was much for them to talk of, but somehow they neither of them cared to talk of it. Since he had seen her Mrs. Northwey had, as she had said she would, fled from

her husband, and gone back to her old home, where were only now the old father and mother, and Lucy, the sister, who had never married, but was always ready to do everything for everybody else, having of course no especial work of her own, and who had now come abroad with the little married sister, who was worse than a widow, and sorely needed to be cared for, and comforted. Captain Northwey had been furious, when he found his wife really gone, he had hastened after her to Fairoaks, and stormed, and sworn in a manner to convince all her own people that Katie had been quite right, and had not come away a whit too soon, and then he had gone back to town, and sworn, and drank, till one morning his servants had found him—not dead drunk, not drunk at all indeed, but still as senseless as if he were so, as senseless as an idiot in fact. He was not at all violent, as the stupid woman left in charge had told Percy Gordon, less

so indeed than he had ever been in the sane period of his life, if indeed any part of his life ever had been sane, for madness was rife among the Northweys, and it now came out that he had had an attack of the family malady long before his marriage. But whatever he had been before, he was mad now, and very quiet with it. Mrs. Northwey went back to him again then; her people wished to keep her away from him, but she would not be kept away any longer now, all her old love for him had returned, and she went back to him, and nursed him; nursed him devotedly as Lord Lansdon had said, till there came a turn in the madness, and a furious fit came over him, and then there was nothing for it but to put him under the care of a physician accustomed to such patients, and, as it was, Mrs. Northwey only escaped with her life as by a miracle, for he tried hard to kill her first, and very nearly succeeded, and then when she had escaped, and he was safe under the

care of skilled and practised hands, Mrs. Northwey in her turn broke down, and her health was found to be so shattered, that the doctors ordered change (doctors always do now-a-days; food and change, change and food always the same) and the maiden sister Lucy was sent abroad to look after poor little Katie by the fond old parents, who still talked of Katie as their little pet, and grew older and greyer as they thought of all their poor darling had had to go through of late. Yet they did not know all, for they had heard nothing of Percy Gordon, and they believed that Katie had borne almost more than woman could bear, and been throughout a little saint. But Lucy knew something about Percy Gordon, she had been told something, and guessed something, and though she looked kindly at him, as she looked kindly at all the world, this plain spinster lady, yet she was not over pleased to have him appear upon the scenes, and she dreaded what the effect might be on

poor excitable little Katie, who had always been the beauty and the darling of her family.

As to Katie, she did not dread the effect upon herself in the least. That nursing of her husband had perchance been bad for her bodily health, but it had been very good for her soul's health, and she knew she could never again now be tempted by anyone to think of as possible those naughty things, which she had once contemplated, and even desired. But though she could never be tempted by him any more, she still cherished a great tenderness for Percy Gordon, and felt very unhappy about him, for he seemed to her to be in such bad case that even the extreme of tenderness would be useless to him now. "What can have brought him to this state?" she said, and though Lucy with her plain common sense would reply, "Want of money," something in Mrs. Northwey's heart whispered that it could not be only want of money. That is the contemptuous way, in which women with

large *simpatica* eyes mostly do talk of money, for all they try to appear sensible and practical, and all the rest of it, and mean to be as steady as their neighbours for the future. Then Mrs. Northwey recollected how Percy Gordon had been in love with Miss Lavington, when last she had seen him, and how at first she had been quite sure that Miss Lavington was really Florence Berkeley, and how Florence's ghost, or possibly herself, probably herself, Mrs. Northwey now thought, had appeared to her at the Marble Arch, when she had been going to meet Percy Gordon in the Kensington Gardens, and then one or two more things recurred to her mind.

Percy Gordon came and talked after dinner sort of talk, though he was only in a morning coat, and Lucy made little kindly, every day sort of remarks, and Mrs. Northwey looked the things she could not say with her big brown eyes, but as Percy never raised his from the ground so as to

look into hers, their meaning was thrown away upon him, till at last the little woman in despair, though she knew that by so doing she would greatly shock dear, good Lucy's narrow notions of propriety, threw a shawl about her, and exclaimed: "Do come and take a turn with me in the garden, Mr. Gordon, the moonlight looks so inviting. My sister never will appreciate it, but I know you used to."

Then Percy Gordon took up his hat, and went out with her, his eyes still rooted to the ground, and thus not seeing Lucy's terrified glance of warning, which her little sister did see, and yet felt forced this time to disregard. They took a turn or two in silence, only broken by Percy's cough, hard and frequent, but very low; it would have been contrary to his nature to have had a noisy cough, every thing about him was subdued, even his desperation, it was not like what another man's would have been. It was very hard to Mrs. Northwey to start

talking even now when they were quite alone, she was so anxious to talk of something interesting, and she did not know how to begin; at last she spoke.

"How bad your cough seems! I am afraid I ought not to have brought you out."

"Oh, it is nothing at present," he said dreamily. "It is much worse often."

"Poor fellow!" said Mrs. Northwey, and looked at him.

"Because I have a cough," he said, and looked up and met her glance for the first time, but he quickly looked away. It was terribly like madness that incapability to meet her eye, Mrs. Northwey thought.

"Not because of that," she replied, " but because I think you have other pains different and greater."

"Just a few, perhaps."

"Do you not think me enough of a friend to tell me what they are, any longer? You did not always treat me thus, Mr. Gordon."

"No, I used to have some hope," he said, bitterly.

"And now you have none?" She paused for a moment or two, he walked on quickly kicking the pebbles away with his feet, his hands behind his back, his head down, she had to hurry to keep up with him. "It is not all money, is it?" she asked.

"No, it is not money at all. I had lost all hope before I began to lose that."

"Then it is Miss Lavington, I suppose. I was sure you were falling in love with her."

"Do not talk of her, do not talk of her," he said, and he covered his face with his hands, and groaned, walking faster than ever now.

"Why not?"

"Because there is no such person. That is why," and once more he spoke fiercely, and clasped his hands behind his back, and walked on with his head down.

"Oh, you mean she is your cousin, Miss Berkeley. I was sure of it."

"You never told me so."

"No, but I told Captain Lorraine so the first night I saw her act."

"Yes, and Lorraine told me, and I did not believe him, fool that I was, and in the end I convinced him that it was not Florence. I tell you, Mrs. Northwey—it seems strange that you should be the first person for me to make this confession to, you who—"

"Never mind," she said quickly. "Go on," and he went on.

"I tell you," he said, "I loved Florence Berkeley, when she was a girl, and I was a boy, as a man ought never to love a girl without marrying her, and she loved me then—oh, I know she did, and God knows it too, for it was as good, and sweet, and true a love, as any man can ever hope to inspire a woman with. And I loved her when I met her again, and did not know she was the same, as a man loves a woman, when he *must* either marry her, or go to the

devil straight, and sometimes when I think of it now, I almost believe she loved me too even then, but because of my cursed folly, because I did not know she was the same—After all it was only a mistake," he exclaimed, breaking off wildly, and almost wringing his hands as he spoke, "but she sent me from her, as if I were a dog, or the very dirt beneath her feet, only made in order to be trampled upon. All because of that mistake, oh my God! my God!"

"Mr. Gordon—Percy, listen to me," and Mrs. Northwey seized hold of his hand, and held it tight with both hers, for he made as though he would have run away from her—run away from her—from everything, and hidden himself and his despair in utter darkness. "Listen to me, she could not have treated you as you say, because it would not be like her, it would not be Florence, who—but listen to me. Percy—Percy, listen. I can set it all right. I can, I can."

She was clinging to him now, being

almost dragged along by him, for he would not stop, but he stopped now in good earnest. He seized her by her shoulders, and shook her.

"If you are trifling with me," he said, "if you are daring—But if you can do what you say," and a gleam of wild joy lit up his features for a moment, and Mrs. Northwey thought she had never seen him look so beautiful as then, the moonlight streaming full upon him, his hat casting no shade at all, but pushed back and nearly falling off the back of his head ; even that light weight seemed to be too much for his burning brain. "Sit down," he said, "I am tired. Now tell me," and he sank down into the damp grass, and rested his head upon his hands, lying at full length there, but looking up at her all the time with eager ravenous eyes, and she sank down beside him and said :

"Do you remember that time at Ryde? You know you were to have come to see me

the morning of the day the yachts came back, and you did come, and could not see me, because your cousin Miss Berkeley was with me. Did you not wonder how she had come to be with me that day, when she had never known me before? She had come not out of love for me, but out of love for you, and because she could not bear there should be disgrace upon your name, and she stayed and stayed till I promised I would not go away with you, and I was very wicked, and would not at first, and told her she knew nothing about love nor about anything, and then she made me understand how she had once loved you. How she told me, I can never describe to you, but you have seen her act, and you know her, so you can imagine it, and she must have loved you perfectly at one time, I think. Then when I understood this, I said she wanted to keep you for herself, and before I promised I would not go away with you, she must promise she would never marry you herself,

and she did promise it. Now do you understand why it was she would not say she loved you? It was not because of that trumpery mistake, she was much too great ever to mind about that, but it was because of the solemn promise she gave me long ago. This is what I wanted you to come out with me for to-night. I thought what you have now told me about must have passed, only I was not quite sure, and so I wrote this. Take it and go with it to your cousin, and forgive me for what I have done, when you—are quite happy with her. I am sure you will be soon, for she loved you so well, she must love you still."

Percy had listened without interrupting her once, now he took the paper, and as she handed it to him she repeated its contents. "I release you from your promise never to marry Percy Gordon, and I hope you will be very happy with him, and make him very happy. I have signed it," she added, "Katherine Amy Northwey, and put on it that it is for Miss Florence Berkeley."

Percy listened to her, folding up the slip of paper, as she spoke, and as he did so a smile of triumph played round his white lips.

"I forgive you now," he said, "now at once. You have made me so happy, I can think no more of any past sorrow now. Good-bye, dear little Katie, how I wish you could ever be half as happy, as you have made me now. I am a ruined man, it is true," he exclaimed fiercely, "but what does it matter? What does anything matter, if she loves me—loves me," he repeated, lingering softly and tenderly over the words as if they were too dear ever to part with quite, and then he stooped and kissed Mrs. Northwey's forehead, and next moment he was gone.

It was the second time he had kissed her, but nothing of the kind had ever passed between them, all the while he had been making love to her, and fancying himself in love with her; he had never kissed her then,

nor called her by her name, except in his thoughts, nor had she ever called him by his, but now this evening when all had been over between them such a long time, they neither of them thought it mattered much how they treated each other, for their hearts they knew were right. They were friends now, good friends, and they had both suffered, and this was all they cared to recollect of the Past, that had been between them, and Percy was very joyful now, and much joy had done for him what sorrow never had, and made him unselfish for the moment, and pitiful of Mrs. Northwey, who could never again know such joy as he then knew, so he kissed her, and then next moment he was gone, and Mrs. Northwey gathered herself up, and went back to the house. She had got to reconcile her late proceedings with spinster sister Lucy's notions of propriety, and out of kindness to her sister she did not wish to delay about it, but she did not feel much uneasiness about that now, for

she meant to tell her all, and then she knew it would not be hard to persuade Lucy of the innocence of her moonlight walk. Only she wished Percy Gordon's voice had not been so thick and husky, as he spoke those last words. For his voice had been like that of a man, to whom something very great had happened, so great that he had lost all mastery over his voice—over his mind—over everything.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THE FUTURE HAS ITS HEAVEN, AND THE PAST ITS LONG AGO."

"THERE is Lord Bulmer, Miss, wants to see you very much. Can you see him?"

"Oh yes. Show him up."

Florence was lying on a sofa in the little darkened room, again in close state of siege from the fierce summer sun, and very close it felt. It was Sunday, but she had not been to Church, that even she had been compelled to own herself unequal to; she would act till her very last night, for she had pledged herself to act for a certain time, and her pledge she would keep, but anything further she could not undertake. This interview with her uncle was not much, and

yet she would have shrunk from that also, if she had been able.

Lord Bulmer came in, rather groping his way through the semi-darkness: "My Florence, my dear sister's child, can you ever forgive me, can I forgive myself? Oh my poor dear, my poor dear, how could you? What was it made you, Florence dear?"

"I wanted money, uncle Henry. But please do not pity me so much. I expected you to be quite indignant with me, and I thought you really were so, as I did not hear from you."

"Your letter was not forwarded to me at once, and I was not at home when it came. I started to see you, directly I got it, and I have no right to be indignant," said Lord Bulmer hurriedly; he seemed grown very tremulous, and now he sat down nervously, as if afraid to trust himself any longer standing. "I left you to yourself, and to the Boltons, and I knew they would want money. I have no right to be angry now

at anything, but I am very sorry, Florence, very sorry."

"You will get over the idea soon," she said soothingly.

"No, I shall never get over it," he replied pettishly, putting up his hand to smoothe into order the scanty white locks, that were so very scanty now. "I am an old man, and there is not likely to be time given me to forget that I let my poor sister's child go upon the stage for want of money, even if I ever could forget it. Well, I have no children of my own, and my money won't do me much good a few years hence, I might as well have spent a little more of it before now, and saved you, my poor child, from having to earn your bread, and becoming a common actress, in order to do so."

"You must not talk disrespectfully to me of actresses now, uncle Henry. Remember I am one myself," said she playfully and stroked caressingly the poor withered hand, that was resting upon the table now, but still trembling.

He looked fondly at her, and pressed her hand. "I shall not forget it in a hurry," he said. "But you must come and live with us now, and be like my own child. Look upon all that I have as yours, for it shall all be yours some day."

"No, no, uncle Henry; please, not for me. Fanny wants money much more than I do."

"She is Mrs. Bolton now. She has chosen her own protector, I cannot look upon her as my niece any longer."

"But she is. She is my mother's child as much as I am, and though she may be Mrs. Bolton to the rest of the world, to you she ought always to be your niece Fanny."

"She has children of her own now, has not she?"

"Yes, two little boys. Such handsome little fellows! you ought to see them."

"What is the name of the eldest? I think you told me, when I saw you last, only I forget everything now."

"Harry is his name, but they always call him Tottles."

"That is *his* name," said Lord Bulmer relapsing into gloom.

"It is your name too," replied Florence coaxingly.

"No, I was never called Harry," and he drew himself up with dignity. "From my childhood upwards no one has ever called me anything but Henry."

"But, dear uncle Henry, Tottles was christened Henry too, and you cannot possibly object to his name, when it is your own also."

But Lord Bulmer was very obstinate about it, he objected to the child's surname, if he could not object to his Christian name; he had always been difficult to convince of anything, and he was now more difficult to convince than ever. Florence began to pity "cousin Mary," as she talked to him, he was so very impracticable. He wanted Florence to be like his own child now, and

could not understand, why she should not go away with him at once. Surely some arrangement could be made with the manager of the theatre, and she looked much too pale and ill to act, and then he would not give over repeating, that if he had but taken her away before, when he so much wished to, all this mischief would have been avoided, without understanding that this mischief, as he called it, had come about long before, and that she was just as much pledged to act then as now. He stayed a long time, but at last they saw Fanny coming up the quiet Square, and Lord Bulmer would not stay to meet her; he said he would come again next day, and then went away pompously, and with dignity, but all the same still very shaky and nervous.

When he came again next day, he received a fresh shock in meeting one of the celebrated physicians of the London world just coming away from seeing Florence.

Fanny had been made so anxious by Florence's looks the day before, that she had insisted upon her at once having the best medical advice, and now the celebrated man was coming away after having rather shaken his head over her, and talked not a little about her nervous system, and looked uneasy about her lungs, and insisted much on perfect rest, strongly advising also a winter abroad.

"I don't recommend any particular place," he had said, as he went away, "for there is nothing in particular very wrong with you yet, and all climates have their bad sides, but go to some place you have a fancy for, and do your best to rest. You look to me like a person who could rest, now give yourself a fair chance, and we shall soon see you with a colour in your cheeks;" then he bowed himself out, but as he went down the stairs he finished his sentence to himself. "Go on acting and exciting yourself, and we shall soon hear of you in your

grave." And to tell the truth the doctor thought this latter supposition much the more probable of the two, for he had recommended rest to too many patients already, not to know well by this time how few people could follow such advice, how few even ever attempted to do so.

Lord Bulmer was very anxious about the doctor's opinion, and almost pleased when he heard a foreign climate was recommended. "That will suit Mary," he said; "she has been bothering me for a long time to take her abroad, only she wants to go to Rome, and I do not like that. It sounds so dreadfully bad, does it not, 'going to Rome?'"

"It is only in one sense that it sounds bad," said Florence, almost laughing, as she tried to make him understand this; but all her efforts at explanation were in vain, and once more she pitied "cousin Mary."

"No, no," said Lord Bulmer, after she had been trying to convince him for at least ten minutes. "Going to Rome! that sounds

dreadful. But let us say some other place; say Florence, now, your name. There, that sounds quite different. Going to Florence! oh, it has quite another sound. Should you like that, my dear child?"

"Yes, I should like that very much, uncle Henry, thank you. I am very fond of some of the pictures there; but will cousin Mary like that as well, and will she like my coming to live with you at all?"

But Florence's fears on that subject were all set at rest, as soon as Lord Bulmer went down to the country again; for Lady Bulmer was only too charmed to find she was certainly not to be condemned to another solitary winter in an English country house, and did not care in the least to what southern place of resort she went, Florence as soon as Rome, and Naples as soon as either. Besides, now that Florence Berkeley had become known to the world as an actress, Lady Bulmer did not fancy that she could still be so very saintlike, or that her virtues need

any longer be a daily reproach to herself for not aiming at the same high standard. Over and above which, Lady Bulmer, though a fast, silly woman, who, when quite a girl, had sold herself to a man old enough to be her father, not actuated at all by any respect or regard for himself, but solely by respect and regard for his coronet, was yet not wholly bad, and understood better than her husband ever could, what a sacrifice Florence had made, and why she had made it; and, though she had never really cared for her, she felt sorry now for the poor girl, who had been left so friendless, and borne herself so bravely. So she wrote Florence a very affectionate little note, saying how glad she would be to have her with them once more, and how, out of compliment to her, they meant to winter at her name town, and hoped the two Florences would agree with one another, and she hoped, also, that Florence would come, and stay with them as soon as possible in their English home, till

it was time to go abroad, and she put a great many more pretty things into her note, and expressed it all very prettily, for Lady Bulmer excelled in this kind of thing, when she chose.

But as she was to winter abroad, and everyone seemed to think that was the best plan now, Florence decided she would not go to the Bulmers at once, but stay with the Boltons somewhere or other, till they had to join their depôt, and then stay there with them also, till it was time to go abroad, for she wanted to be with them as much as possible. Major Bolton's debts were all paid now, and he and Fanny were free to start upon their joint incomes and his pay, and felt as rich as millionaires, if indeed millionaires ever do feel rich, for they must be horribly hampered by their responsibilities. The Boltons were not hampered by theirs at all, for they were not millionaires, indeed they were very far from being so even now, and Fanny looked brighter and more blooming than she ever

has done in all the course of our acquaintance with her, but the weight did not seem to be lifted so clean off her husband as off her, and she sometimes almost wished to hear one of his old sharp revilings, instead of those gentle subdued tones, hardly ever raised above his breath now. He was certainly ill again, and Fanny was very anxious about him, more anxious about him even than about Florence, though Florence looked more and more like a broken lily each day, and how she got through her acting at all was more than Fanny could understand. At last it came to her farewell night, and the Boltons went to see her for the last time, and Captain Curzon was in their box, and this time he did a good turn in the way of introduction, and brought Bertram Beresford to it also, and the four watched Florence together, as she went through it all for the last time. Again and again was she called for back, after it all was over, but there was

nothing very sensational to show that the first actress of the day was quitting the stage for ever. Wreaths and bouquets were showered on her of course, but that they always were, and she could hardly find more costly chains twisted round them, or more valuable lockets hidden inside them, than she had found there before. At last she was allowed to make a positively farewell courtesy, and then she disappeared for ever from the boards.

"My heart, my heart is broken," cried little Charlie Cust, and fell as if fainting into a brother clerk's arms, and just one or two men, who had no chance whatever of knowing her, and yet fancied that they did already, felt almost perhaps as Cheeky had pretended to feel, but they gave little outward sign and flocked out of the theatre much as usual.

Captain Curzon and Captain Beresford went home with the Boltons for a congratulatory little supper, and Florence looked in

upon them for a while, and again Captain Curzon had his innings, and Bertram, though he had himself introduced his friend, and fancied he had foreseen all that could result from the introduction, and being forewarned must also be forearmed, yet looked on with the same bitter feelings, with which he had so often watched Percy Gordon; but he bore it like a Spartan, and sternly told himself, that henceforward his country's good, and no lesser thing, must be the one object of his desires. "Were it not better done as others used, To sport with Amaryllis in the shade, or with the tangles of Neæra's hair." There could be no temptation to him there, for there was only one woman whom he cared for, and there certainly seemed to be no danger of his losing himself in love delights with her. But though he told himself, he must care henceforward for his country's good, and no lesser thing, yet there were bitter feelings at his heart now, so he strove hard to conquer these

bitter feelings, and accept cheerfully what of necessity must be his lot, giving himself up heart and soul to his country, taking that for his love, and contented to leave all other lighter, and perchance fairer loves to other men, who were such as is pleasing in ladies' eyes, and not like himself, to whom no woman had yet been even suspected of losing her heart, and who had never yet indulged in any love-making on his own account. He did not conquer his bitter feelings utterly that night, but it was calmly and quietly, and not like a lover at all, but like a good true friend, that he spoke, when he first got an opportunity of speaking to Florence alone.

"I have heard from your cousin, and he will not come to England, he says, he is making too good a thing of it at Hombourg. That might be all bravado, but I have taken care to hear from others, and I have learnt that he has been winning wonderfully, so we must only hope, that this luck may not have

changed very wofully, before he tires of play. My cousin Clanwilliam, a very good, steady fellow, is just gone abroad, and before he went, I made him promise to go to Hombourg, and look Gordon up. He will be there soon now, and he is a very good fellow, and much better suited, than I could ever have been, to advise Gordon, if he needs any advice."

"Thank you very much," said Florence, and held out her hand to him.

"Oh, not at all," said Bertram, but he pressed her hand very tenderly, before he released it, and when he did let it go, it was suddenly, and then he found out it was time to go himself, and he got up and went at once. And Captain Curzon, who had before arranged to be driven home by him, had to go also, though he did so very reluctantly.

"And now what shall we do?" asked Florence. "I have been able to think of nothing beforehand, because I felt as though this night would never come. But

now it has, and I am free again, and there is no reason why we should stay here any longer, so do let us go somewhere, and escape this heat, which is enough to kill anyone. Harry, you look as if you wanted sea breezes, what do you say to our going to Ryde? I should like to take the house the Gordons had there, and for you all to come and stay with me, and after that, if you are civil, you will ask me to go and stay with you at the depôt."

And so it was settled, and Captain Curzon, great stupid goose, got more and more convinced that he did not care about shooting any longer, and that yachting was the one thing he always had cared about, and so he went down to Ryde also. But when he got there, he did not yacht, nor did he even invest in full yachting costume, which seems to do just as well for many people. The Boltons went excursions, and he went excursions with them to Alum Bay of the many coloured sand, and to Blackgang yclept the

grand, and to Shanklin Chine the pretty, and to Bonchurch of the many fairy like villa gardens, nestling under the cliffs, and it was while wandering through the lovely landslip between Bonchurch and Shanklin, that Captain Curzon plucked up heart and told his love.

It was told very shortly, though sweetly, as such a man would tell his love, and he soon understood that there was no hope for him, though Florence's eyes brimmed over with tears, as she said in a very faltering voice, that she could not bear that so much love should be wasted on her, who was so unworthy of it.

"It is not wasted," said the big man bluntly, "it can never do a fellow anything but good to have loved you, Miss Berkeley, and if it does you no good, it can do you no harm to have been loved by me. Don't fret about me, like the darling that you are; it takes a great deal to knock down a great rough fellow like me, and I shall be right as

a trivet again some day, though it does take the shine out of the sun at first, rather," and the tears glittered in the honest fellow's eyes, as he nearly crushed her little hand in his, and then strode away into the brushwood.

He came back after a while, and the Boltons never felt quite certain about what had passed, nor when; but that night Captain Curzon said good-bye to them all, for after all, he said, he could not bear to think of those partridges, "just waiting wishing to be killed," and not have a try at them himself. The Boltons stayed some little time longer with Florence at Ryde, and they went on much as before, though Captain Curzon had gone away. They did not frequent the Pier much, though they went there once and again for old times' sake, but they took long drives and walks into the pretty country round, and Fanny and Major Bolton indulged in many sentimental reminiscences, and all were very sorry when

their time came to leave Ryde—dear Ryde. Though without any very special charm of its own, and a certain number of most unsociable inhabitants, it was yet such a very handy place to live in, and they had all become quite attached to it by this time.

CHAPTER XIX.

"'TIS THE SAME LITTLE CUPID WITH THE SAME DIMPLED CHEEK, AND THE SMILE ALMOST STUPID."

THE depôt life was strangely new to Florence, she could not understand the regimental talk at all at first, how Jones had sold out, and Brown got a step, and Smith had gone on leave, and she was shocked at Fanny for being just as shoppy as the other regimental ladies, who all talked of duty days, and being on guard, and the colonel, just as if they themselves were serving under that very arbitrary and all powerful tyrant. (N.B., this last word is here used in the old Greek sense, and by it

no reflection is intended on the colonel of the depôt at which Major Bolton was quartered.)

Florence herself was a great subject of conversation at first, she was fêtée too a little in a manner most distasteful to herself, and not a little annoying to the Boltons also. The young ensigns just caught from school, and only now beginning to be licked into shape, were wonderfully impressed by the idea that she was the great actress, Miss Lucia Lavington, whom some of them had been so fortunate as to see, when they had been treated to a run up to town to have a jolly time of it, as a reward for passing their Exams., as these would-be fast young men called them. But they, poor foolish young men, with all their troubles to come, had got feelings yet themselves, and thought other people might have some also, so they did not wound Florence with coarse flattery, as some of their senior officers did pretty freely. Doubtless there are nice men in the army, very nice men, just as

there are very nice men not in it, but if there is any class of men who have a knack above other men, of saying nasty speeches by way of compliments, and which can, therefore, hardly be resented as the insults that they really are, it is a class composed of army officers who have been some years in India.

Florence suffered in silence for some time, but at last her annoyance found voice in words. "One day," she said to Fanny as the two sisters were sitting alone together, a visitor of the class last mentioned having just left them. "One day I was coming home from nursing a poor child; the child was dead, and I was coming home alone at four o'clock in the morning through a very bad part of London. I was so very tired that I could not stay till morning as I should otherwise have done, and of course there was no cab or anything of that kind to be had. It was just after I had first begun acting, and tired as I was, I felt very nervous, and

as I was hurrying home I met a half-tipsy Irishman, who called out, 'Arrah, is it the sun that is shining out so early? Blessings on your swate face, me darling, but if I did not think it was the sun shining down the street, and it is your pardon I am axing, for now I see it is like the moon you are, and I love the moon entirely, far better than that great noisy sun, always sending a poor fellow about his business with its "Bedad, now you are idling."' Of course I walked on the faster, for the man was half tipsy, and I was frightened all alone in that wretched part, but I could not help smiling at him even then, for I liked the compliment, and I have never forgotten it. It is so different to the things that gentlemen say."

"Don't call them gentlemen," exclaimed Fanny. "They are a horrid low set here at the depôt, and I am only thankful some of them are going to be moved soon. That Captain Levison is just the sort of beast I

used to flirt with before I married, and people called me heartless for trying to make them feel a little pain. Well, it was very wrong, I daresay. But I wish you knew some of our men. It is wonderful what a difference there is in officers." This was all the comfort Florence got from Fanny, and it was not much, as no more of 'our men' were likely to come home at present, so Florence only wished to get away to Italy, and hoped her actress reputation might not be so generally known there. She was quite ill now and very spiritless, nothing seemed to revive her at all. She had drooped more and more since that day, in the Landslip near Bonchurch, and sometimes the Boltons wondered whether it were not after all a case of "faint heart," and whether Captain Curzon had really gone away without offering, and Florence was pining for him now. Anyhow she looked very worn and ill, she had no cough, but her complexion had grown

more transparent than ever, and there seemed to be nothing left of her, so very thin had she become.

They were glad when it was thought late enough in the autumn for the Bulmers to go abroad, for they thought change might do her good, but Fanny cried not a little at parting from her, and tears were glistening in Major Bolton's eyes, as he said: "God bless you, Florence, my good angel. We shall always think of you night and morning." And Florence understood what he meant, and smiled the still sweet smile that we all like to see sculptured on the face of marble angel, but that no man would ever wish to see on the face of living being that he loved, for it is too like the smile of death.

Just at this time Linda Beresford was married, and I only wish I could reproduce the pages of the "Court Journal" which gave an account of the wedding, for it was just such as was befitting a daughter of the

house of Beresford. It was held in St. George's, Hanover Square, for Colonel Beresford would not hear of its being anywhere else, so to that cold comfortless looking chapel they all went, and found it thronged, as it generally is on the occasion of a grand wedding, and everything was done very correctly, and many tears were shed. Linda wept profusely, and Mrs. Beresford, who was out for the first time for months, for she was a great invalid, wept also not a little, and Colonel Beresford blew his nose sonorously on every appropriate and inappropriate occasion, and pretty Mrs. Jenkinson buried her face in her lace handkerchief, and even Beauregard was very near catching the infection according to his best man, who maintained that he himself and Bertram Beresford were the only two who remained unmoved in the whole grand assemblage. The bridesmaids, of course, were dreadfully agitated, and some of them, indeed, so foolish as to allow

their eyes to become most unbecomingly red. As to what everyone was so unhappy about, that no one could by any possibility have said, and indeed, the marriage was considered a great cause of rejoicing; and had been treated as such till now at the last moment, when, however, it was too late to put it off. Notwithstanding there being no ostensible cause for such sorrow, Linda sobbed bitterly as she kissed her father and mother at the conclusion of the ceremony, and clung almost convulsively to her brother, when she gave him her farewell maiden kiss, though why this kiss is never given till the maiden has already become a wife, is just one of those matters which no fellow can understand, as Lord Dundreary would say. Then there were the usual bad jokes over the signing of the register in the vestry, and after those were over Linda walked down the church upon Philip's arm, the happiest of happy brides, though still a tearful one.

"Don't you wish we had decided not to have it?" said that wicked Beauregard, "Something like having all one's teeth dwawn at once, ain't it?"

And Linda smiled through her tears, but then fell a sobbing—

"Oh I never will—I never will be married again," she sobbed out.

At this the inhuman Beauregard laughed aloud, the rarest of rare events with him, who but seldom suffered even a smile to disturb the serenity of his handsome regular features—

"Glad to hear you say so, weally. Weally vewy kind of you, dearest," and then he kissed his absurd little goose of a wife, as what bridegroom would not under the circumstances?

Just as Colonel Beresford had decreed that the wedding should take place at St. George's, so he had also decreed that the bride and bridegroom were to remain for the breakfast, and that there were also to

be speeches, and his will, being generally overruled in matters of any great importance, was always held paramount about minor matters, so Philip and Linda remained for the breakfast, and Philip had to make a speech, though how he ever was to do so beat every one; and after it was over the best man declared it was the bride's composition, and that notwithstanding it was the shortest bridegroom's speech on record, Beauregard forgetting all but the big words in it, as that gentleman had a trick of doing in his conversation. The prettiest of the bridesmaids, to whom the best man said this, and who was his companion during the whole of that day, as of course, declared that she had counted twenty-nine *haws* in it, not to speak of innumerable *aws*, such as every English speaker is always allowed *ad libitum*, and then she and the best man attempted to beguile the monotony of their situation by a variety of vile puns and riddles about paws and caws and haws and

aws, and thus these intellectual young people amused themselves, till the best man himself had to make a speech, during which, whether or no the bridegroom had been assisted by the bride, the best man was most evidently prompted by the prettiest bridesmaid, and between the two they inverted several of their best turned sentences, and made a horrid hash of it, as said the other discontented bridesmaids, who had no best man to amuse them, and as usual found Bertram Beresford no good for a flirtation, though he made a very good speech himself when it came to his turn, and afforded the next speaker a happy opportunity for prophesying future triumph in the House from the eloquence "of which we ourselves have just heard so pleasing a specimen," and thus they went on, till at last no one had a call to get upon his legs any more, and the wedding breakfast was at last at an end, just as most such grand formalities do come to an end soon enough, if people would only

take them quietly, and not make quite such a groaning over them.

But before I quit the wedding party, I may as well set the curiosity of the public at rest, by informing it very respectfully that the best man did not end by marrying the prettiest bridesmaid, being indeed himself engaged to some one else all the time, though neither she nor any one else knew this, except only the best man himself and one other, there being difficulties in the way of their announcing the fact, which had to be overcome first. And that the best man may not be left without a leg to stand upon, I must also add, that when he whispered to the prettiest bridesmaid (though, alas! his whisper was overheard) in that very sentimental tone, how his favourite name was Adelaide, he was wholly unaware that that was the prettiest bridesmaid's own name, and had indeed quite another Adelaide in his thoughts all the time. And as a good many people did say, that notwithstanding

all the excuses that could be made for him, still the pretty bridesmaid's life was blighted, and in that young man's heartless behaviour on the day of Linda Beresford's wedding lay the explanation of the otherwise inexplicable fact, why her prettiest bridesmaid never took a more prominent part in the marriage ceremony, I must be allowed to add that the young man's name was Spanker, and that the young lady receiving a present of a dog just about the time she heard of Captain Spanker's engagement to the other Adelaide, she called her dog Spanker, in remembrance of the tender whisperer, by whom she had been so egregiously taken in, thus to my mind showing very satisfactorily that there was no more heart on her side than on the gentleman's.

Linda Beauregard was even more impassioned in her last kisses before leaving her home, than she had been before quitting as a wife the church she had entered as a maiden. Again she hung upon Bertram most affectionately of all—

"Don't look so dreadfully grave, Bertie dear," she said.

"My dear little sister, I am only looking so grave to think you should seem to regret so much what——"

"Now don't, Bertie, don't lecture me my very last day. I declare it is not fair," cried Linda, pouting out her rosy lips.

So Bertram kissed them.

"God bless you, darling. Take care of her, Beauregard."

"Not if I know it. Expect to be taken care of myself now," replied the graceless bridegroom, and then they drove away amid the usual volley of old shoes.

By degrees the wedding guests dispersed, and after a day or two Bertram was free to take a week's leave, which he had been putting off till now, and to go down and shoot his own wild duck, since Percy Gordon had not chosen to undertake it for him. He had invited Captain Curzon to share his sport, and there was more shooting and less

talk done during that week than is generally the case when two young men, who like each other cordially, join together to slaughter the inferior animals for their lordly will and pleasure. Yet though they were silent, they were not unpleasant days, and I would I could write a description of them, but let any man, who wants to know what they were like, have a week's wild duck shooting himself in prime country, and in fresh, cloudless October weather, and he will only be the happier ever after for the knowledge, and as for the women, they must be happy as they can in their ignorance.

Though they did not talk much, and indeed never once mentioned Florence Berkeley's name, Bertram knew as well as if he had been told what had passed between her and Captain Curzon, but this knowledge gave him very little fresh hope for himself. "If she did not take Curzon, whom would she take?" Bertram sternly asked himself, when rebellious hopes, which he wished to

crush down in their birth, began to arise in his bosom. "Surely he was just the man for her, if she ever meant to marry at all." For Bertram always had all his money wants so amply provided for, that though very practical about other things, he could not possibly believe that a more or less sum of money could influence a woman very greatly in the choice of a husband, and as to its ever influencing Florence Berkeley, he would simply have derided the idea. Captain Curzon had quite enough of a fortune to marry upon, and if he had not a title, yet he was a gentleman, and what could any one want more, as far as worldly goods went? As to character, Bertram had long ago decided that he was just the man for the beautiful actress to fall back upon, and rest on, and it did not make him very hopeful for himself to find she had rejected Captain Curzon, indeed it made him so little hopeful, that his only desire was summarily to destroy his hope. But he had

not much time to think about it, for the week's shooting was soon over, and then he had to go back to his guardsman's duties, and to make his final appeal to his father, to allow of his selling out, and standing for the county. A general election was near at hand now, and there was no more time to be lost, if his father's consent was ever to be won, so Bertram put away the thoughts of his love, and turned his mind to his country, the only love to which, as he often told himself, a great ugly fellow, such as he, could ever be suited.

BOOK IV.

CONCLUSION.

ALL MUST ANCHOR SOMEWHERE.

Il n'est rien de beau, de doux, de grand dans la vie, que les choses mysterieuses. Les sentiments les plus merveilleux sont ceux qui nous agitent un peu confusément; la pudeur, l'amour chaste, l'amitié verteuse, sont pleins de secrets. On dirait que les cœurs qui s'aiment s'entendent à demi-mot, et qu'ils ne sont que comme entr' ouverts. ..... Quand les mystères de la vie finissent, ceux de la mort commencent.

Chateaubriand.

CHAPTER I.

"I CAN GIVE NOT WHAT MEN CALL LOVE."

THE Bulmers crossed over the channel, taking Florence Berkeley with them, and all England was given up to the horrors of a general election, and bribery and corruption were the words in everyone's mouth, but to which no one could be found to plead guilty *in propriâ personâ*, and everyone seemed morally convinced contrary to all copy-book maxims, that two blacks made a white, and that if they could only prove something sufficiently shocking against somebody else, they themselves might do what they liked and escape scot free. Then through all this fire of impurity came out

as by a special miracle the purest governing body ever known, if we may believe the Anglomaniacs among us; but first there were all the electioneering trials to be gone through, and some of the elections to be had over again, and all this as everyone knows takes some time, the miracle is not an instantaneous one. But this latter part of the process Bertram Beresford escaped, he had at last won his father's consent to his selling out of the Guards, and he had at once dropped the captain before his name, in preparation for taking M.P. after it, and now he was already able to add those two honourable letters, for he was not now only a civilian as Captain Curzon had said so disdainfully, but also a member of Parliament, having been returned as the liberal member for the county of ——shire, and his election happily for him was not among those petitioned against. He had not taken his seat yet, and could not yet awhile, so in preparation for making the laws of his own

country, Mr. Beresford, M.P., seemed to think he could not do better than go abroad for a little to study the laws of some other country, and out of all the European governments he selected for this purpose the recently established kingdom of Italy, and started off direct for its capital fair Firenze.

He had known Lord Bulmer slightly before, and was not long about making his way to his house, but when he did so Bertram Beresford was shocked by the change he saw in Florence. She seemed to him to have given up life altogether, now spending her days almost entirely upon the sofa, smiling softly when she was spoken to, and always answering sweetly, but without seeming to care about that, or about anything. In truth she did not care, she had overstrained her powers, and like all those who do so, she must now pay the penalty. The least thing overcame her, and she could not bear that others should see how powerfully what were to them

trifles agitated her, and so she lay still on the sofa and worked, always ready to give Lady Bulmer assistance about her dress, or to listen to Lord Bulmer's prosings, but taking no interest in them, and trying as far as she could that nothing that could possibly interest her should ever come in her way. She had been very anxious to be useful once, and at first when she was acting in minor parts, and even afterwards, when she was taking all she could out of herself in the time, and becoming known as the first actress of the day, she could not bear to lay aside all her little attempts at usefulness among those, who were poorer and less able to help themselves, than she was to help them, and more than once or twice, a good many times indeed, she had gone straight from the theatre, only pausing to change her dress, to watch by some sick bed, or to comfort some timid soul about to enter on the valley of the shadow of death. It was madness, as anyone would have told

her, but she asked no one, and to herself it seemed at the time as if she could not do otherwise, could not suddenly forsake those, to whom hitherto she had been a friend, just because she had all at once become famous, and doing her best as a principal character took ten times the strength out of her that doing her best in an inferior part had taken.

Perhaps it is want of faith, and in great measure a presumptuous fear lest, but for them, the wheels of the world should grow clogged, that is at the bottom of all this over-working, but anyhow, though it is a fault of the day, it is a fault into which the conscientious and the energetic among us are most liable to fall, and therefore not altogether to be reprehended, as if there were nothing to be said in exculpation of it. But Florence did not seek to exculpate herself, she owned to herself that she had done wrong, and took her punishment very meekly, trying to be useful no more,

but lying on the sofa all day long, still making clothes for the poor certainly, but not working hard even at that, for she knew quite well her life depended on her resting, and though she did not care at all about her life, and was willing to die or live just as should please the Giver of Life, yet she knew she had no right to throw away His gift wilfully, as she would be throwing it away, if she worked now. So she did her best to rest, but how difficult it is to do that, let anyone say, who like her has tried to rest with a shattered nervous system, and a heart that beats but faintly, and not a grain of physical strength upon which to fall back. Bertram saw at once that she was failing in her attempt, failing in part because she had made the great yet common mistake of trying to do absolutely nothing, almost as impossible to some people as to find out the secret of perpetual motion has ever been to all, though not quite so in all cases if one may attach any

credence to the tales of Indian Fakirs and such like.

Bertram sought to rouse her interest in something, and yet knowing he was trying a dangerous experiment, he only dared to attempt to interest her in something quite out of herself, and that had nothing to do with herself, so he talked to her of party politics in which his own interest had of late become much greater, and then after he had tried that for a few days, he began to talk upon his old subject, the poor laws, and Florence listened to him, and smiled the still sweet smile that he could have worshipped her for, and that yet sent a death-pang through his heart, each time he saw it, for he did not worship her only, he loved her, and though she listened and spoke sometimes, yet she spoke as if only to show her sympathy about what he was so much interested in, not as if she were interested herself, for she strove hard at first that this should not be the case.

She did not want to be interested in anything any more herself, it was that which tired her so she thought, and even yet prevented her from resting quite.

Lord Bulmer did not like Bertram's views, they were not what he had been accustomed to in his young days, and his notions of gallantry were somewhat shocked by such a selection of subjects, on which to converse to a young and beautiful girl, so he did not care much about the young man's society. And Lady Bulmer had no taste for anything but the frivolous, and considered Mr. Beresford much too dry and learned for herself, so though no one opposed his coming to the house, no one pressed him to come, or sought his society much when he was there, and he generally found himself left *tête-à-tête* with Florence, who being always on the sofa could not make any pretext of an engagement elsewhere as an excuse for leaving him, even had she wished to do so; and by degrees it

got to be an established custom, that he should drop in some time in the morning and talk to her, always sitting in the same chair by Florence's low couch; and by degrees Florence got to look for his coming, and would have been disappointed if he had not come, though he never gave her a chance to find out how that would feel. So it all went on for some time, and no one thought any harm of it, certainly not Florence, indeed she thought not at all about it, for she had given up thinking in those days. But though this sort of thing might have gone on for ever amongst shepherds and shepherdesses in Arcadia, it cannot go on for ever in this nineteenth century amongst ladies and gentlemen even in Italy, that land of interminable romance; something always happens to interrupt it sooner or later, and so it was in this case.

"I hear Castle Dene is the most delightful old place," said Lady Bulmer with animation one morning after breakfast, looking

up from the pages of the Court Journal, almost the deepest literature she ever indulged in.

"Is it?" said Florence with the still sweet smile that was yet so void of sympathy, being so wholly void of interest.

"Rather too far from the railway. I can't bear being buried, but you would not mind about that, I daresay."

Florence paused in her work and looked up, and Lady Bulmer saw her hands beginning to tremble, and a pink flush mounting into her cheeks, as was always the case now when anything occurred to agitate her.

"Of course Mr. Beresford is in love with you, though I must say his is the oddest way of making love I ever came across, but I suppose it suits you, for you always seem to be glad to see him now, and you mean to have him, do you not?"

"I have never thought about it," said Florence, and began to tremble all over,

till Lady Bulmer was quite frightened at what she had done.

Florence could not regain her composure that morning, and when Bertram came at his usual hour, he saw at once that something was wrong, but he took no notice of it apparently, and began to talk as usual, producing a blue book which he had promised to show her, and beginning to explain it to her. It was on a subject in which Florence had been very much interested at one time, and to Bertram's great relief he now saw her agitation gradually subside, and her cheeks resume the pallor that had become like second nature to them, and was at any rate more like health than that lovely, but all too delicate pink flush, which only came at her worst moments. As they talked, the subject of their talk changed, till they came at last to discussing another of the questions of the day, namely, woman's rights, and how they were affected by marriage. They were discussing it in the most impartial of tones,

and as if it were a subject that little interested either of them; but one of them was deeply interested, for he was watching for his opportunity, and trying to bring it about as naturally, and as little startlingly as possible.

"Do you think you could ever bring yourself to be the wife of any man?" said Bertram at last. He was sitting on his usual chair beside her, one hand still turning over the pages of the blue book, the other stretched across the foot of her couch, and resting on the back of it, and he did not even look up as he spoke.

"No, I don't think I could," said Florence gravely, but she was not thinking of the woman's rights she would have to give up, but of the husband's claims to love, which she thought she could never satisfy.

"I am sorry for that," said Bertram, still very quietly, but looking at her now, "for I love you 'aboon a thing,' and it would make me happier than happy if you could be my wife."

"Oh Mr. Beresford, I cannot think that —I cannot—"

"If you could, would it make any difference?" and his hand slid down from the back of the sofa, and caught hold of one of hers, but it did not grasp it tightly, only held it, and yet Florence felt she was as unable to withdraw her hand from that simple holding, as if he had seized her with an iron grip.

She did not attempt to do so now—she let her hand lie in his, and looked up at him with deep blue eyes, that seemed to appeal to his judgment as if in distrust of her own.

"I will tell you the whole truth," she said. "Long ago I loved some one very much, so very much that though my reason told me sometimes he was not the kind of person to be very constant, I still thought he must be, for I loved him so much, and I fancied love must be the same, whoever felt it, and I was true to him for several years, because I could not help it. But he was

not true to me, and of course long ago what I felt for him has changed, only I can never love any one again as I loved him."

"I do not ask for such love as you gave Percy Gordon. No, do not start, dearest; I have thought so much and so often about all your past life, that I seem to know great part of it, though you have told me hardly anything. I do not ask you to be my wife, if you cannot love me, but I love you very much, and do you not think you could love me some day—as my wife?"

He looked at her with an expression she had never seen before on his face, as he spoke, and Florence's eyes sank before his gaze. She had told him all, as she could never have told any other of the men who had proffered their loves to her, for she could never have trusted their judgment to decide, but she had implicit confidence in Bertram Beresford's judgment; and now, when she had told him all, he yet seemed to think he would be satisfied with such

love as she might even now have to give him, so she bowed her head, as she said very soft and low :—

"I would try."

Then for one moment she was caught up into Bertram's arms, caught up and strained tight against his beating heart, and one long kiss was pressed upon her forehead, but then Bertram recollected himself, and laid her down tenderly, as if he had been her mother, and sat beside her, and talked to her, trying to soothe away the impression of his first impulsiveness, for fear Florence should think that he was already claiming more than he had asked for, but he held her hand all the while, and so doing he had hard work to keep his eyes from dancing with the joy so long and so passionately desired, and now at last attained. Florence had indeed been a little fluttered by the first embrace, but she was calm again soon ; she was not going to think about that or about anything, no not even now. When she

had once brought herself to say she would try, she thought nothing could be easier or more natural, and she accepted Bertram as her husband, her lord and master, but also her protector and comforter, from that day forward. She could rest now.

But first there was one subject that must be considered.

"Will your people like it? What will they think of my having been an actress?"

"My mother will not think twice of it, and my father always sees things just as she does in the end, though he takes his time about it first sometimes," said Bertram.

Then it was settled that he should write to his father and mother before anything was said of their engagement to any one else, for Florence was not really bound to win any one's consent. But Bertram must not do what his people disapproved.

"I never have done what they disapproved yet," said Bertram, drawing himself up, "but if they disapproved of this——"

and he broke off, looking down at Florence lying pale and beautiful on the sofa.

"You would not do it either," she said softly, and smiled; not that smile that had pained him so much of late, but a quite different happy smile, though there was something strangely still about it yet. "Besides I could not. One must be proud sometimes."

"You will have no need to be proud with my father and mother, only proud of them, I hope, for they are the dearest people in the world, and I only long for you to know them. It is so long since you have had a mother, my poor darling, and mine will love you dearly," and he stooped and kissed her.

Then Florence, among whose many memories that of her dead mother was the sweetest, loved Bertram Beresford better than she had ever thought to love him, for thus seeming to think that the best thing he had to offer her was his mother's love, and that riches and position, and all the rest he had

to offer, were as nothing in comparison. She did not love him as she had loved Percy Gordon; she was different now, and did nothing quite the same as she had done it then, but she thought it would be wondrous easy to love Bertram Beresford—as his wife.

Bertram Beresford went away that day from the Bulmers' Palazzo, happy, as he had never looked to be, for he had had very little hope, and would never have plucked up heart to tell his love that day, had he not seen that something, or some one, had been troubling Florence, and that she was already disturbed by the idea of their relationship to each other. Bertram dreaded agitating her himself, but seeing that some one else had already done it for him, he thought it best to get it all over at once and for ever, and thus to try if he could not restore calm to her, risking all his hopes to do so. But the very intensity of his love made him the more afraid for her in her weak nervous

state, and this may perhaps excuse the somewhat cool manner of his wooing, which was but as the thinnest possible crust of lava over the surging of the volcano beneath. But now he had wooed and won, and there was no need for thin crust, or for volcano, any longer, and his passion might change now at once into its next and better phase, the life-giving heat that makes bright and happy the peaceful fire-side of home. He was very happy now.

Bertram's mother did not act quite as he had said she would. She did think twice about Florence's having been an actress, indeed she thought a great deal about it, and though she had seen Florence act, and been struck, as everyone who had seen her had been struck, by the sweet natural simplicity of her acting, she called to mind how the extreme of art is to conceal the art, and still felt uneasy, and though she had seen Florence's loveliness, yet she recollected how it was no new thing for the face of an angel to smile

unconsciousness over the schemes of a Messalina, and that even the lovely Mary of Scotland was not exactly what any mother would desire for a daughter-in-law. She thought too, that she knew how a man's fancy was often lightly caught; but then she recollected what her son was, how he was not just one out of the multitude of men, but an individual man, a man whom she knew well, and then she was comforted, and, with her mother's fears allayed, she wrote to her son a loving mother's letter, and in it she wrote a little note to Florence also, saying how, though she did not know her, she felt sure that the girl her son had chosen must be such as she would rejoice to call her daughter, and she only longed to have the comfort of her presence, now that her own daughters had both left her, and gone to gladden other homes.

Nor did Colonel Beresford act quite as Bertram had expected; as it happened, he thought less about Florence having been an

actress than his wife, for he also had seen her acting, and he thought it simply the most perfect thing he could imagine, and her face the loveliest, sweetest face he had looked upon for many a long day, and he longed to have it beaming quiet happiness in the grand old rooms at Castle Dene, which looked somewhat desolate now that Tina and Linda were both henceforward to be only occasional visitors, so Colonel Beresford wrote a very kindly letter to his son. Of course it greatly smoothed matters with both him and Mrs. Beresford, that though their son's chosen wife had been an actress, she was also Miss Florence Berkeley, and at this moment living under the roof of her uncle, Lord Bulmer. Had she been nothing but an actress, they would have found the pill much bitterer to swallow, whilst as it was, the Colonel hardly even discovered that it was a pill. Linda, as was to be expected, wrote a rapturous letter to her "dearest darling brother Bertie," and another almost

equally rapturous to her dear unknown sister, Florence, and told them both that she thought they might possibly one day be as happy as she herself and her dear good Philip, "who, will you believe it, dear old Bertie, actually made the discovery the other day that he could say his r's as well as anybody, and all because I believe he really could not say, 'So Bertwam has made it up with Flowence at Flowence after all,' which ridiculous speech he attempted. Oh, Bertie, you don't know half how dear he is. I love him ten times better than ever,"—this Linda said in every one of her letters—"and we are so happy," she finished up with as usual. Tina had married before she had fairly made the acquaintance of her own family, so it took some little time before she heard of the new engagement, but when she did so, she wrote a very pretty little note to Bertram, which was just what it ought to have been. So all his family took the announcement very satisfactorily, and it became clear to Florence that none of the

difficulties she had at one time anticipated were likely to be put in the way of her marriage with Bertram Beresford.

As to Fanny, she was quite ecstatic when she heard that Florence was going to be made happy at last, "and not in her own way," exclaimed Fanny, as if this added immensely to her joy, and happiness were not happiness in whatever way it might be found; but then people never do really believe this, if they would only question their inmost souls, and see how many special weaknesses they would refuse to give up, even to buy happiness therewith, so it is no wonder Fanny did not believe it any more than the rest of the world. Major Bolton was very much pleased also, and both he and Fanny rejoiced tenfold, as the gushing Linda would have said, when one of cousin Mary's long epistles arrived for Fanny, saying she could not resist writing to her any longer, for she really must tell her of the wonderful improvement in Florence's health since her

engagement—"I know you will never believe it, only from her telling, and she really is able to go about and do things like other people now, though, as she always did to my mind, she still looks more suited to stand on a pedestal in one of the galleries here, than to do anything else." Lady Bulmer also gave them yet another cause for joy, for she went on to say: "I don't know what you will think of it, my dear Fanny, nor whether Major Bolton will swear as much as fathers generally do under such circumstances, which he certainly will do, unless he is a great deal changed from what I remember him, as, however, Florence assures me is the case. But whether he swears or not, I think I may as well tell you that your uncle has just made his will, leaving all the bulk of his property after my death to your son Harry. Both Florence and I have done our best to persuade him to leave it to you instead, but you know how obstinate he is, and as, after all, I may very likely live as

long as you, it does not make much difference, and it is something to think that one child is provided for. Of course your uncle wanted to leave it all to Florence, but she would not hear of that; and now she is going to make this good match—though nothing to what you might have made a hundred times over, you very silly girl—of course that would be too absurd, so he has given in at last. There is a thousand pounds to go to you on his death, though he still declares he means to have nothing to do with you while he is alive, but I dare say that will not break your heart; and as for me, I do not mean to think any more of that ridiculous Ryde quarrel, so do write me one of your nice, long, chatty letters. As to all the provisions for your little Henry's education, I am not enough of a lawyer to understand them, but you know your uncle's ideas about minors, and how fussy he is, so you can probably imagine them."

Thus wrote Lady Bulmer, and more in the same style, but the two pieces of news —that about Florence's well doing, and the other about Lord Bulmer's disposition of his property—sunk all the rest of her letter into insignificance; though, over and above the pleasure she felt in her tidings, Fanny was very glad to have her old friendly relations with cousin Mary renewed, for they two had always been very good friends in the old days.

CHAPTER II.

"I WISH I HAD ONLY THAT HEART I TROD UPON AGES AGO."

THE rest of that Italian winter passed like a happy dream to Florence Berkeley, and I would that my book could end with it, for like most of our lives on earth it has been all too full of sorrow, and would not be the worse for a little more rejoicing, but one more melancholy chapter yet remains to be written. No dream can last for ever, and there was a terrible awakening, calling "down from love's height unto the world of men," and Florence Berkeley had once more to feel regret, and, bitterer still, self-reproach, though whether that last was

called for Heaven knows alone. Who ever grieved bitterly without some feeling of the kind? Well, we are none of us quite *sans reproche* in our dealings with each other, not even perchance that *Bayard sans peur* of famous memories, if we only knew the secrets that now lie hid for ever between him and his Maker.

Before her dreadful awakening from

> "An unknown sweet land of heavenly light
> Divinely aired, but where each rose and leaf
> Was trembling, as if haunted by a dread
> Of coming thunder."

Florence had become well in health, well to all intents and purposes of every-day life, though not strong, that she was never very likely to be again. But she was well once more, and going about as usual, when one morning she was told that a man wanted to speak to her, and going down into the *cortile* through which were all the ways of egress and ingress into the Bulmers' palazzo, as into most Italian houses, found there a

handsome Florentine, who with many bows and polite circumlocutions informed her that there was a *signore*, her countryman, seriously ill in his house, who asked so urgently to see her, that the doctor had this morning bidden him, Giovanni, go forth straightway, and seek the English young lady, and see if he could persuade her to deign to enter his humble dwelling, all lowly though it was, and unworthy of the honour.

"What is the gentleman's name?" asked Florence, and she smiled as she spoke, for she saw Bertram Beresford entering the *cortile*, and it was the first time they had met that day.

"Signore Ghiordano," replied Giovanni laboriously, as though he were trying hard to repeat a difficult word correctly.

Florence looked at Bertram, and Bertram looked at Florence, and quickly he put one or two questions to the man for her, then he turned to her and said: "It is Percy

Gordon, dearest, and I much fear he must be dying. These Italians never like to say so, but the doctor would hardly have sent for you, had it been otherwise."

"I will go at once," said Florence, and with a face like marble, and lips tight locked together she was passing swiftly up the great staircase, when Bertram followed and stopped her.

"It may be infectious," he said.

"If it were to kill me, I must go," she replied.

"You must take me with you then," said Bertram.

"Why—why?" asked Florence, and the blue eyes looked pleadingly down at him. She was standing one or two steps above him, and she now turned to wave him back, as if to warn him of the infection that she herself was determined upon daring.

"Because you could not go alone, and Lady Bulmer would not, as you know, go

with you, and Lord Bulmer is away. You need not be afraid to take me with you, dearest," he added as he followed her up the staircase. "It is not jealousy that makes me say I must go too."

"No, no, I know it is not," and Florence turned and threw her arms round him, and kissed him, sobbing a little, then she tore herself away, and running up the remaining steps of the great dark staircase passed swiftly to her room to prepare herself, and Bertram went down to the *cortile* again, and questioned Giovanni about this Italian *signore* and his illness.

It was not infectious, Giovanni protested, would he have been likely to have come and asked this beautiful young lady, like one of the angels, to go and see the poor *signore*, if his illness were infectious? Would the doctor have been likely to send him for her? No, it was a consumption, a galloping consumption, and the Englishman had fallen ill directly he had reached Florence,

and been out of his mind for some time, but he was sensible now, only very weak, and dying, dying rapidly. So Giovanni owned now that the young lady was no longer present, though had she been by, nothing would have induced him to be guilty of such a *grossièreté*.

Thus it came to pass that Florence and Bertram went together, guided by Giovanni, to seek out Percy Gordon, and they found him lying in a large, desolate, badly-furnished Italian room, yet a room evidently made as comfortable as its capabilities, and the finances of its owners admitted of. There was a handsome Italian woman, Giovanni's wife, nursing the English *signore*, and on her warm heart the foreigner's beauty or heavy sickness, or both combined, had evidently made an impression, for she seemed to have done all she could for him, though little hope had she or her husband entertained of ever being repaid for their care of him, in this

world, at all events. She now came forward with the tears streaming down her cheeks, casting many sorrowful glances at the beautiful face resting so death-like already upon the pillows. Percy's eyes were closed, and he seemed in a sort of stupor: only his breathing came short and hard, showing he was yet alive, and the colour in his cheeks was hot and fierce. But he did not move or look up as they entered.

"He has been like this ever since Giovanni went out," said the woman sobbing. "He will not even drink now, he is so afraid to part with that bit of paper, which he always holds crumpled up. See *Signorina mia*," as Florence went forward to the bedside. She sunk down on her knees beside the low bed and laid one of her hands on the poor burning forehead, stroking back the once soft silky hair, now alas! grown so wild and rank. "Percy," she said.

He opened his eyes now, and they met hers, and he raised himself up on his elbow. "Florence, my Florence," he murmured feebly, and he drew her face down to his, and kissed it passionately, then he pushed her a little away from himself and thrust a paper into her hand. "Read it, read it," he said, but even as he spoke he was almost choked by a violent fit of coughing.

Florence looked at him, and looked at the bit of paper, but it was so old and crumpled, and her eyes so full of tears, she could not read it, so she only helped to raise him up, and looked again pityingly at him, and stooped to kiss him on the poor burning forehead.

"Poor, poor Percy," she said caressingly.

"Ah," he said, "I knew you would kiss me now when you saw that. I have been searching everywhere for you to give it to you, only I have been ill so—so often, and so long." He gasped now between the words: "Oh, Florence, we might have

been so happy, and—and—but say you love me now, say it with your own dear lips. Say, 'I have loved you, Percy, as I have loved no other man.'"

Florence hesitated, but the dying man's eyes were hanging imploring upon her face, and as she did not speak, he half raised himself upon his elbow again, and Florence spoke quick and low. "I have loved you, Percy, as I have loved no other man."

She never knew if he had heard her, but she fancied she saw a smile play round his lips as he fell back dead on the arm she had passed round him. Dead! Yes, Percy Gordon was lying dead in her arms, and that tiny stream of blood from his mouth would not flow long now, for the internal hæmorrhage had killed him. Florence stood up and looked at him, and her eyes were tearless as she did so. She looked at the man whom she had truly loved, as she had loved no other man, and she thought of Percy, when she had first known and

loved him, and acknowledged to herself that he was even more beautiful than of old now, as he lay there worn and wasted in death, with eyes that would never more look sweet things at any woman, not even at her whom he had loved first, and last, and with lips that could never smile again, for all they glowed so rich and red, save where the deep stain of the blood showed.

Bertram Beresford came forward now, and passed his arm round her, and unfolded the piece of paper she held in her hand, and they read it together. "I release you from your promise never to marry Percy Gordon, and I hope you will be very happy with him, and make him very happy. Katherine Amy Northwey." Then Florence hid her face on Bertram's shoulder, and wept bitterly.

"I could not but say it when he asked me," she said.

"You did quite right, my own. It was never that love I asked of you, you

remember. Poor Gordon! poor fellow!" and Bertram stooped and closed the staring eyes, still as always of that tender blue of the Neapolitan violet, and always beautiful. "Kiss him once again, poor dear fellow, and then come away," said Bertram, and at her future husband's bidding Florence stooped and kissed her first love for the last time, and was then led away unresisting.

Lord Bulmer had been telegraphed for from Genoa, but he did not arrive in time for the funeral, which had to take place next day, as is the law in most southern countries, and thus it came about that Bertram Beresford was sole mourner at the funeral of Percy Gordon, his one time rival, of whom he had once and again felt such bitter jealousy, but whom he could now afford to pity, for had not Percy proved himself unworthy, and thus lost the love of her by whom it was now Bertram's happiness to be beloved. Florence had wished to attend the funeral, but she had

been much shaken by the interview of the day before, and Bertram begged her not to go, and Lady Bulmer was very urgent about the wrongness of her doing so, when she was herself hardly well yet, so in the end she yielded and stopped at home. As to Lady Bulmer, she hated sorrowful sights and scenes, and did not feel called upon to go, she said. So Percy Gordon's body was committed to the ground; "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," and only Bertram Beresford stood by and saw it done, and heard the solemn words said, and thought those awful thoughts we all must think as we hear the priest speak of "our sure and certain hope," and then he went to Florence to tell her all was over, and to comfort her so far as she could be comforted.

"Dearest, he died happy," he said, "he believed you loved him to the last, and he had grown to care for nothing in comparison with that. If he had lived and been undeceived—Oh! it is better as it is."

"Yes, I know it," said Florence, but her words were scarcely audible.

"All the old time comes back to you now," said Bertram very tenderly. "I understand that."

"No, it is not that only."

He looked at her questioning.

"If I thought of him only as he was at St. James's Cray, I should feel sorrow, but only sorrow then. I should know, not try to believe, it is best for him as you say. But, Bertram, what has he been doing since I saw him in London? He was very beautiful in his death, but there were lines on his face which I never saw there before, and when the features settled in death, I thought the smile passed away, and he looked hard and reckless, as I had never thought to see Percy Gordon look."

"Partly that was your fancy, dearest, and partly it was the fever that had killed him, which gave him that look. Do not let these thoughts prey upon you. We

both know Gordon's faults, but he had many, very many good qualities, and I have often thought of late how little help he had. With his quick impulsive character, he needed a kind firm discipline, and he needed some one to teach him that without principle as a guide he never could go right, and all that he had to do without. He was an orphan very early, recollect, and though the navy is good training for some, it was rather too rough and ready for him. Let us think of all this, and now we can do nothing more for him, trust him to our Father, Who loved him better than we could, and knows all. Let us trust him to Him, dearest, for indeed it would only be wrong to harass yourself about him further now."

"Want of faith," said Florence meekly, and she tried to harass herself no more about her first love and her childhood's ideal, who had fallen so far short of her ideal now, but the thought of him was a very sad one to her for long after, perhaps even

to the end of her life, and she never ceased to think, "If I had been different to him even that last day, when he poured out before me all the love I would once have died to gain—if I had been kinder and less wrapt up in my own feelings, I might have saved him yet, now—now who knows—" Alas! who ever knows how it is with the loved ones, when they have left our sight? Faith, hope, and charity, all three are needed to comfort those that mourn.

After this Florence's marriage was an even quieter one than it had originally been intended to be; it took place in the fair Tuscan capital, just when the spring was coming on, and all nature with its fresh bright beauty was calling upon man to hope for a good time coming—coming very soon. And then in that sweet spring weather they spent their *mois de miel* in that land of enchantment, which seems only made for such golden times, and as if none but lovers, and those who have been too recently

united to have as yet found out any roughnesses in each other's characters, should ever wander there. Need I name it? The Italian lake country. They could hardly tear themselves away from Como, and tarried long on the shores of Maggiore, and even made a pilgrimage to the pearl white island rising out of the very centre of lovely little Orta, and then they crossed over the grand, glorious Alps, and having left Italy behind them, hurried home to England, for Bertram to assume that seat in the House which was his already, though he had not yet claimed his right to sit in it.

The Beauregards were there before them, swelling it now together in the married state, much as they had swelled it before, each separately, that is to say each in a very different way, yet each suiting the other admirably, and Linda was trying hard to take that prominent place in society at large, which she had long ago attained in her own little immediate circle, and so

trying she found a formidable rival in the new Lady Mincington, who after all, had not been chosen from the giddy topmost circles of the Upper Ten, but from the ballet dancers of the Italian opera house, among whom she had long been renowned as being able to stand longer on the tip of one toe, than any human being before her, and who was now making full use of her opportunities to impress upon the minds of men, what were the characteristics of the ladies of the period, and very successfully as far as the impressing them went, though how far those impressions were truthful, it is rather more difficult to decide.

As to Lord Lansdon, we all know what end he had come to, at least so far as society is concerned, for he did not blow his brains out, or otherwise make a violent end of himself after that year's Derby, when an outsider won, as an outsider will now and again, and the favourite broke down at the starting-post, as even favourites will some-

times. Some people say he is still living in the colonies, but anyhow he disappeared then and there from fashionable society to the great regret of one or two distinguished money-lenders, together with a whole host of smaller creditors. Since that time he has never been heard of more, save for a report that one of the oracles of the day at one time thought it worth its while to print in the smallest of small type, how "that the noble Lord, whose sudden disappearance from the turf had caused such consternation among betting circles, was now establishing steeple-chases in the Sandwich Islands." Whether this report were true or not mattered little; it did very well to talk about till another oracle appeared, with fresh intelligence, more startling.

Lord Bulmer died suddenly, soon after Florence's marriage. Much against his will his wife carried him off to Rome for Easter week, and there, much against her will, and indeed much against the will of everyone

else present, the obstinate old English Lord persisted in sitting down in one of the well-known deadly gardens after sunset, and was attacked with malaria next day. He had for long been much broken in health, and now he never rallied. After his death it was settled by an arrangement with the Boltons, which suited them just as well as Lady Bulmer, its originator, that Major Bolton should sell out, and go and live upon the estate which was eventually to be his boy's, being paid so much a year by Lady Bulmer for looking after it, so long as it was in her possession. And this suited all parties admirably, for she hated the country, and was wholly ignorant of farming, and Major Bolton, though hardly strong enough for his regimental duties, found in looking after this land just enough occupation to save him from being that wretched creature, a man wholly without occupation. He was sorry to leave the old regiment in which he had gone through so much, but he was not

strong enough for its requirements any longer, and he never lost sight of his old friends in it. He soon grew to be a strong and happy man in this new country life, free from debts, or any of the other vexations that had preyed upon him so long, though, of course, there were new ones, but these were of a different nature, and thus in some ways easier to bear. It was only when he looked over Lord Bulmer's papers in conjunction with his executors, that Major Bolton first understood that the eight hundred pounds given him on his wedding day had not been Lord Bulmer's gift, but the gift of Florence, his wife's little sister, and his and her guardian angel. But Florence was now so rich and flourishing and happy, that this discovery did not weigh upon him as it would once have done, had he made it sooner.

Anyone can fancy what a good-natured stirring mistress of a country house Fanny made; but it was, perhaps, a little hard upon Major Bolton, that while no one who

had ever known him before, could fail to notice the improvement in him since his marriage, and all attributed it to his wife's influence, no one ever attributed the improvement in her to him, and yet it was as great, if not greater, for Fanny had been a worse creature before her marriage than he had ever been, as a fast girl must always be a more repulsive object to look upon than a fast man, and had she not married, she would have been, what it is horrible to think upon, a woman who has missed her woman's vocation; for hers was not the character to find out a path for herself in life. But she had trusted all her well-being to one man's constancy, and good cause had she to be thankful that he had not failed her, but had called upon her to perform a woman's duties, and thus had turned the evil, she had gone through, into a warning for her, instead of leaving it, such as it was at first, the foremost step upon the downward road.

Of Florence, the heroine of our story,

but little more can be said, not that her after lot will be unmingled Sorrow, or unmingled Shine, but that part of her life into which Percy Gordon's faith, or want of faith, poured the sweet and bitter at his wilful will is over, and its story is told. Percy Gordon has had his influence over her for good or for evil, and his influence can do no more now, only of his memory will she ever continue to think sadly, yet fondly. He had been very true to her in a fashion, terribly true to her, though he had gone near once to break her heart by his want of constancy, but now it was a question which had been most true to the early love, Percy or Florence. Let the reader decide that as he can. It will not do to go against such a great authority as the master-singer of our land, but if it be so that "Men were deceivers ever," still I think that of many of the men in this book, it was most true that they had "one foot on shore;" the other foot may perchance have been upon the sea,

but then surely it must have been ebb tide, and that foot must have rested upon the sand, for they never strayed far from their first love, though one of them married another. Of the women too it is hard to say who was constant and who not, whether Fanny who had been engaged to more men than she could easily remember, and yet married her first love in the end, and vowed she had cared for no one else, or Florence, who remained true to her love till she knew that such truth would be sinful, and then could never love again as she had once loved, but yet married too in the end, a man very different from her young ideal, a man who could not well be any woman's ideal, but who was yet a man for all that, and such a man as any woman might be proud to call her husband.

Bertram Beresford is only a rising man as yet, and his name but rarely mentioned in the papers, but the far-seeing ones, who had thought his career nipped in the bud

by his early marriage with a young and beautiful girl, already acknowledge their mistake, and not only look out for his opinion, by it to form their own, but already think him a man to be courted, those at least of them who have sons to be provided for, for already do they think that Bertram Beresford will ere long have himself the giving of honours. Colonel Beresford is yet alive, and dotes upon his little daughter, and Mrs. Beresford is not sparing of the mother love, of which Florence has for so long felt the want, and she needs it still, for though she has now a very strong and very loving protector, to shield her from all the sorrows from which she can be shielded, yet the wife of a political man, who is in earnest, has a hard time of it in these days, when so many people are in earnest, desperately in earnest, and so many, alas! also so wrong-headed. Bertram Beresford was never a man to go with the multitude, and he is not guided by a party

now. As he has been endowed with a powerful intellect and a talent for swaying the minds of others, it is probable that ere long he will himself form a party, but as yet he is the head of none, nor properly belongs to any, but is only a brave, earnest, and far-seeing man, fighting resolutely for what he himself holds right, without concerning himself with the various party views of the day upon each disputed question, or, bolder still indeed, without concerning himself much as yet about expediency. As such he has a hard time of it, and his wife who loves him, and is interested in all that interests him, for that reason as well as for others, has a hard time of it too, and she needs mother love, and now happily for her she gets it, and she has to give mother love herself now, and she and Bertram are very happy, though they have their troubles. As, indeed, who has not? For "man is born to sorrow as the sparks fly upward," and in this woman's

lot differs not from man's. But all their troubles are divided now, and fall but lightly, and so let us say farewell to them, and bid them God speed through the Sorrow and the Shine, and truly I think it will be well with them, for the "Foot on Shore" is not like to falter now, and for those who love well and truly the working and the weeping are very different from what they are for others, the deceived or the deceivers.

THE END.

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